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Compiled: 2026-09-29

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SĪLA IS SAMĀDHI

(by Bhikkhu Anīgha)

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What exactly is the connection between *sīla* and *samādhi*? Is it that virtue *aids* or *facilitates* the development of mental composure[1], in the way that a suitable diet *contributes* to an athlete's top physical performance—a secondary factor that allows for better results with greater ease, or that prevents setbacks down the line? This is what the relationship is often imagined to be, especially given how modern notions of *samādhi* go together with arbitrary practices that have no direct connection to the abstinence from unwholesome acts, except perhaps in that one cannot move, speak, or (supposedly) think *at all* while one is engaging in them. Because of this, the link between *sīla* and *samādhi* is often rather contrived and tenuous, and is not a central theme within the overall picture.

[1]Translating "*samādhi*" as "composure" throughout. It will become apparent how and why "concentration" or "absorption" are highly inaccurate.

> *"A renunciant thus accomplished in virtue sees no danger in any direction with regard to their virtuous restraint. In the same way as a king who has defeated his enemies sees no danger from his foes in any direction, a renunciant thus accomplished in virtue sees no danger in any direction regarding their virtuous restraint. When they are endowed with this* ***noble aggregate of virtue*** *(****ariya-sīla-khandha****), they experience a blameless happiness internally. That's how a renunciant is accomplished in virtue."*
>
> *-DN 2*

Being *accomplished* in virtue provides one with a form of composure that one can easily fail to recognize due to one's expectations of what *samādhi* is about, and thus even a person who has put in the work into their virtue correctly can end up misapplying their efforts in various directions that do not take that same virtue as foundation, which is what would have not only resulted in greater composure, but also in a comparatively straightforward and seamless manner.[2] Conversely, one not yet sufficiently accomplished in virtue can be tempted to put the cart before the horse, and thereby end up reaping either frustration, or a sort of *samādhi* that somehow does not seem to be contributing to true knowledge-&-vision, thereby destroying the first five fetters and making them *incapable* of experiencing lust for sensual pleasures and ill-will. Because that is what *sammāsamādhi* would *have to* result in, especially if the person already has plenty of familiarity with the Dhamma and the Four Noble Truths, *and* they've been practicing right composure for years.[3]

That other sort of *samādhi* would instead provide a person with ecstatic experiences that simply take them away from their problems for a while… until they come back, while also encouraging them to keep the virtue chiefly ***in order to*** once again experience the meditative ecstasy they can't have enough of, not because they are *truly* disenchanted with sensuality, which is actually a *prerequisite* for the first jhāna.[4]

> *"For one who is composed* ***no volition need be exerted****: 'Let me know and see things as they really are.' It is natural that one who is composed knows and sees things as they really are.*
>
> *"For one who knows and sees things as they really are no volition need be exerted: 'Let me be disenchanted and dispassionate.' It is natural that one who knows and sees things as they really are is disenchanted and dispassionate.*
>
> *"For one who is disenchanted and dispassionate no volition need be exerted: 'Let me realize the knowledge and vision of liberation.' It is natural that one who is disenchanted and dispassionate realizes the knowledge and vision of liberation."*
>
> -AN 10.2

Now, I should clarify what the expression "aggregate of/accomplishment in virtue" means[5], since it is obviously not being claimed that mere adherence to a set of rules, be it 5, 10, or 500, is enough to give rise to *samādhi*. *Sīla* or virtue should not be taken—at least by one who aspires to mental purification—as the undertaking of the precepts alone, but rather, using the common phrase of the Suttas, as the avoidance of the *slightest fault*[6], i.e., any action by body and speech that is motivated by lust, aversion, or distraction. This means that one must start recognizing these unwholesome things *in one's own mind*, rather than determining what is suitable and unsuitable through the details of *what* one did, where, how, at what time, to whom, or

[2] Of course, this is not to say "easy" or "quick", let alone formulaic, methodical, and comprehensible to the masses, but rather that it will be plainly obvious how, to use an analogy, it's all been the growth and development of one and the same plant, without an introduction of alien factors. That growth and development is what is called the "Gradual Training" in the Suttas.

[3] And even before reaching freedom from sensuality, it would be clear that that's where one is heading.

[4] cf. AN 6.73. Notice the emphatic expression "seen correctly as it truly is with proper wisdom" (*yathābhūtaṁ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭhaṁ*). This Sutta alone should serve to disprove the idea of "pure *samādhi* without discernment"—a viable notion only when *samādhi* is taken to be the result of a repetitive exercise of attention and "no thinking", something which is notably absent from the Suttas unless it's being read into them. The standard instruction for abandoning the five hindrances in the Suttas (e.g. DN 2, MN 39, MN 107…) is nothing other than *contemplating* the drawbacks of those very five hindrances, regarding them as debt, illness, imprisonment, slavery and an uncrossed desert. An example of this practice will be given here.

[5] *Accomplished in Virtue*

[6] Definition of a Fault

for what external reason[7], or because it simply "feels" nice, wholesome or kind on the surface[8]. This proper virtue also involves not being content with simply adhering to the external form and standards set by a specific tradition or group.

By gradually learning, first and foremost, to *recognize* one's state of mind[9] as it is, and then taking *that* as the criterion for the character of all of one's actions, big or small as they may be, one is already working towards the indispensable foundation of all proper *samādhi*—picking up the "hints" of the mind (*cittassa nimitta*)[10]. The discernment of those "hints" is what enables one to abandon defilements where they *actually are* starting with one's actions, as opposed to dealing with secondary factors or taking on practices and habits one *assumes* to be always wholesome in themselves:

> *"Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook were to present a king or a royal minister with various kinds of curries: sour, bitter, pungent, sweet, sharp, mild, salty, bland. That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the hint of his own master's preference:*
>
> *'Today this curry pleased my master, or he reached for this one, or he took a lot of this one, or he spoke in praise of this one; or the sour curry pleased my master today, or he reached for the sour one, or he took a lot of the sour one, or he spoke in praise of the sour one; or the bitter curry … or the pungent curry … or the sweet curry … or the sharp curry … or the mild curry … or the salty curry … or the bland curry pleased my master … or he spoke in praise of the bland one.'*
>
> *"That foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not gain [gifts of] clothing, wages, and bonuses. For what reason? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskilful cook does not pick up the hint of his own master's preference.*
>
> *"So too, bhikkhus, here some foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, recollected, having curbed longing and aversion regarding the world. While he dwells contemplating the body in the body, his mind does not become composed, **the blemishes are not abandoned**, he does not pick up that hint.*
>
> *He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, recollected, having curbed longing and aversion regarding the world. While he dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, his mind does not become composed, the blemishes are not abandoned, he does not pick up that hint.*
>
> *"That foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not gain pleasant dwellings in this very life, **nor does he gain recollectedness and clear comprehension (sati-sampajaññā)**. For what reason? Because, bhikkhus, that foolish, incompetent, unskilful bhikkhu does not pick up the hint of his own mind.*
>
> -SN 47.8[11]

This Sutta points out how a person would not realize that using the four *satipaṭṭhānas* is not automatically skilful in and of itself, just like any given dish is not guaranteed to please the king, no matter how good the cook or other people think it is, or even how much the king took from it yesterday. The four *satipaṭṭhānas* are skilful **only** if they are being used *for the sake of abandoning the blemishes*. And for that, one needs to ***see*** "blemish as blemish" clearly *first*, i.e. see the hints of the defilements in one's mind, which practically goes hand-in-hand with stream-entry. [12]

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[7] Hence, falling into excessive clarification of the details of the rules to find out what is a fault is a mistake. The fault is in one's own mind, and no amount of scholarly hair splitting of the texts can reveal that, but only self-honesty.

[8] Not that kindness is bad, but merely "feeling good" is an insufficient criterion.

[9] This alone takes a great deal of work and abandoning of ingrained views.

[10] I've chosen to render *cittassa nimitta* as "hint of the mind" to avoid the connotation of a mystical "sign" or "image" that would appear to one in the way a sight would. This is impossible if that *nimitta* is to be anything central to freedom from suffering, which it absolutely is.

[11] This does not mean, as it's sometimes interpreted, that different "skilful means" are necessary at different times or for different people. It rather means that, if *any* approach to the practice from the Suttas is not freeing a person from the defilements, it's because they still haven't learned how to recognize those very defilements, not because "it's not the right approach for them or at this time".

[12] MN 9: *"When, friends, a noble disciple **understands** the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the root of the wholesome, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has unwavering confidence in the Dhamma and has arrived at this true Dhamma."* This is why Right View is necessary for Right Recollectedness, let alone Right Composure.

And this ability to "aim" the four *satipaṭṭhānas* at the right place and thereby achieve all these beneficial results, including *samādhi*, is nothing other than a more refined instance of the same discernment that needs to accompany one's virtue: one needs stop judging good and bad behavior by the external properties of an action, e.g. by the tone of one's speech and the choice of words, or the fact that all Buddhists or those in one's tradition agree that doing or saying this or that is good, and instead *see* whether there is *internal* greed, aversion, or delusion *behind* those superficially "good" actions in one's mind here-&-now. In this way, it becomes obvious how *samādhi* is the *same skill*, just practiced on a much subtler level.

So, if a person fails to grasp the hints of their mind in the coarse context of bodily and verbal actions to the point where the *slightest fault* in any environment circumstance, anywhere in the world can be avoided with certainty, independent of what others or a spiritual tradition may regard as a fault, how will they possibly grasp those hints when it comes to the more refined level of thoughts, in order to *know* the mental blemishes properly and tackle them where they are to be found, instead of misusing the four *satipaṭṭhānas* to address secondary mental phenomena that they *take to be* blemishes?[13]

It's like saying "I can't reliably land an arrow on the *tree trunk*, but I can definitely shoot down the mangoes."

Not even seeing the value of this higher virtue, it is easy to end up believing that stopping one's thinking is what the first *jhāna* is about. It is the same as believing that it's necessary to lock oneself up in a cell for the rest of one's life and never see another human to never commit unsuitable acts by body and speech again. Failing to see what the root of the problem is, one takes the easy route, trying to throw *everything* away, instead of going through the hard work of refining one's criteria of what really needs to be discarded. This is a task which will initially seem much less "palpable", and instead feel vague, uncertain, and comparatively unsatisfying, especially because there is no obvious "prize" waiting anywhere in the vicinity, unlike with a meditation technique, which may promise one such things within days.

Having established these points, what the "aggregate of virtue" mentioned above is should be much clearer, as well as how it would seamlessly *become* mental composure when further refined and fortified. The meaning of the simile of the king defeating his enemies in the first Sutta quoted, DN 2, can be seen in light of this. By seeing the hints of your own mind, recognizing those "enemies" *internally* where they truly are, you gain complete certainty that nothing that comes from any direction whatsoever (circumstances, people, accidents, mistakes) can *force you* to commit a fault, a blemish to your virtue. Having defiled motivations in your mind, overlooking them, and acting out of them is what constitutes a fault.[14] This is how you become your own "enemy".

The word "aggregate" *(khandha)* also adds an important nuance. When the Suttas talk about "aggregate of *sīla*/*samādhi*/*paññā*" this denotes a level of acquisition of that quality which no longer requires *active effort* or additions to it, but is now just "sitting there" like a heap or pile, the literal meaning of *khandha*. In the context of virtue, it means that one no longer needs to stop and interrogate oneself before every action for 10 minutes like in the beginning,[15] but rather every suitable and unsuitable intention within one's mind is clear beyond doubt just by "looking" at it. One has sufficiently learned how to *pick up the hints* of the mind's previously unnoticed motivations. Consequently, rather than needing effort to *keep* one's virtue, effort is now required to *break it*. Using the previous simile, the king would now have to *intentionally* be careless and allow his enemies an opening to strike back and successfully defeat him. It's just too obvious when they're planning to strike back.

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[13] This is an instance where the famous passage from the Kālāmasutta is acutely relevant: *"Come, Kālāmas, do not go by (1) oral tradition, by (2) lineage of teaching, by (3) hearsay, by (4) a collection of scriptures, by (5) logical reasoning, by (6) inferential reasoning, by (7) reasoned cogitation, by (8) the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by (9) the seeming competence [of a speaker], or (10) because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.' But when, Kālāmas, you** **know** for yourselves: 'These things are unwholesome; these things are blameworthy; these things are censured by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them." —AN 3.66 *If one does not see the hints of the mind, it is* impossible *that one's virtue or meditation practice is based on anything apart from these 10 things. Hence the emphasis above on "take to be blemishes." The actual blemishes of both virtue and mind will not be abandoned* simply because *what is a blemish is being believed, guessed, felt, surmised, reasoned, inferred… instead of* discerned*. Faith, learning and reasoning are indispensable, but success takes more than that.

[14] And in the case of breaking the five precepts (with complete celibacy as the fifth), the motivation cannot *not* be defiled. Pretty much everything else requires discernment of one's underlying motivation to be categorized.

[15] And yes, it may be like this initially, but that's only because one is still not sufficiently practiced in picking up the hints of where the faults lie internally.

And this recognition, as the Sutta goes on to say, is what gives rise to a blameless joy. It's "blameless" because it's not based on something that you *acquired* and will sooner or later be ripped away from you,[16] but on something you would have to, *with full deliberation, choose* to cast aside. Literally, not even death itself can take that aggregate of virtue away, and much less can the lack of an ideal retreat environment do so.

At this point it should be noted that this *aggregate* of higher virtue (not just a *pile* of mere precepts and observances), paired with the instructions of one who sees the Dhamma (*parato ghosa*), should already be enough of a basis for a person to develop the Right View. In fact, in the Suttas, the phrase "one who has fulfilled virtue" is often one of the epithets of a *sotāpanna*.

> *Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu **fulfils virtue**, but cultivates composure and wisdom only to a **moderate extent.** He falls into offenses in regard to the lesser and minor training rules and rehabilitates himself. For what reason? **Because I have not said that he is incapable of this.** But in regard to those training rules that are fundamental to the spiritual life, in conformity with the spiritual life, his behavior is constant and steadfast. Having undertaken the training rules, he trains in them. With the utter destruction of three fetters, he is a seven-times-at-most attainer who, after roaming and wandering on among devas and humans seven times at most, makes an end of suffering.*
>
> -AN 3.86[17]

Notice that it is said that such a person might still break minor rules at times (even the Arahant mentioned later in the Sutta could), but that is not what the *fulfilment* of virtue is. It's the fact that they cannot overlook the hints of the unwholesome motivations in their own mind[18], and *because of that*, they do not transgress by acting out of *those* motivations, which is what would compromise the essential training.[19]

Therefore, given that composure is a refinement of the same principle as virtue, it is unlikely (but not impossible) that a person would be able to see their own mind to the point necessary to attain the *jhānas* taught by the Buddha and not become a *sotāpanna* first, because they would've already reached the necessary development long before that. The most likely cause of not becoming one is that they haven't heard the Dhamma sufficiently, or at all, but this is hardly possible today if they put in that much work into purifying their mind correctly, given that other spiritual traditions tend not to stress the abandonment of sensuality to the necessary degree.

In light of this—while an unenlightened person should be encouraged to put in the work towards *understanding* the practice of composure, since understanding it correctly to the necessary degree would already constitute seeing the Fourth Noble Truth and thus stream-entry[20]—they'd be better off not expecting it to culminate in an actual *jhāna* anytime soon, but rather regarding those efforts as one possible avenue to approach the Dhamma, and as a good way to learn how to grasp the hints of the mind and thus of wholesome and unwholesome, which is the condition for stream-entry.

Thus, again, the work would then be in attempting to *understand* what Right Composure is, being careful not to assume they already know what it is, that they understand the *Noble* Eightfold Path. And certainly, taking any "special meditation experiences" they may've had in the past, which somehow don't seem to have contributed to abandonment of sensuality and ill-will, with a pinch of salt.

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[16] This includes a "meditation experience" in the contemporary sense. Anyone who has gotten one of those can ask themselves if it didn't feel like an *acquisition* that they needed to *protect* and were afraid of losing. And yet the first *jhāna* is the *result* of detachment from all acquisitions. *"Here, **owing to withdrawal from acquisitions**… a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna." —MN 64*

[17] Note how this is the *lowest possible stage* for a noble disciple. A case of "fulfils virtue but has no composure" is not mentioned, proving the intimate relationship between the two, also considering that such a disciple with up to 7 lives left would likely not be abiding in *jhānas* yet (cf. MN 13 and AN 3.95). And it will be clear how the virtue described here would eventually take one's composure and discernment to this "moderate extent", even when not dedicating a separate effort to them.

[18] *(1) it is impossible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, who is delighted with company, who is devoted to delight in company; who delights in a group, who is delighted with a group, who is devoted to delight in a group, will find delight in solitude when he is alone. (2) It is impossible that one who does not find delight in solitude when he is alone will grasp the hint of the mind. (3) **It is impossible that one who does not grasp the hint of the mind will fulfil right view**. (4) It is impossible that one who does not fulfil right view will fulfil right composure. (5) It is impossible that one who does not fulfil right composure will abandon the fetters. (6) Without having abandoned the fetters, it is impossible that one will realize nibbāna.*—AN 6.68

[19] See SN 8.1 on the utter confidence in their virtue such a person would have, despite still not *fully* seeing the escape from the mental aspect of the unwholesome. That confidence reflects what *sammāsamādhi* is—immovability amidst things that try to move you.

[20] The understanding of one truth cannot but bring with it all the others. SN 56.30.

If this is kept in mind, it is possible for a person still without the Right View, but who has developed their virtue to as high of a degree as possible, to derive some benefit from often pursuing the following type of reflections as a "meditation" practice in the proper sense.[21]

Virtue (which includes sense restraint, moderation in eating, and general not acting out of unwholesome states[22]) needs to have been developed and understood to a point where you can at least notice some degree of that "blameless joy", which comes from discerning and correctly restraining the degree of unwholesome intentions that you've learned to pick up on so far, without intentionally *trying* to give rise to that joy with the help of secondary mental drills, because that would be done *at the expense* of the abandoning of craving.

Having gone to a solitary place, free from the presence of others and from distractions, thoughts in the form of desires, annoyances, boredom/laziness, anxieties and doubts about various issues will inevitably come to the foreground of attention, and here you can—with the *memory* of your virtue[23] as the central foundation—start discerning how a different route than the usual two extremes of indulgence and denial can be taken towards those mental states.[24]

So, *recalling* (sati) the past efforts to develop virtue, are there some valuable insights that could be carried over and used to not let the mind get blemished on account of these assailing thoughts which clearly came on their own, *without* wanting to put your hand into what is not yours by trying to get rid of them?

Remember some occasion in the recent past where you were faced with a prospect to break your virtue. What did you do? Did you find a way to stop that annoying fly from doing what it does, or did you simply resolve that you *would not kill it?* Do you smash every bottle of alcohol you come across, or do you simply *not drink* even if you're asked to? Did you prevent all sexually appealing people from existing, or did you simply *restrain* the urge to pursue them? And, most importantly, why is it that you now don't feel a threat to your virtue whenever these temptations and annoyances inevitably knock at your door, much unlike when your virtue was still weak?[25]

It will be evident that it's because now you're *confident* that you will ***not*** open that door, no matter how hard or how long it gets knocked on. And *that alone* is what gives rise to the *factual* safety you would be able to recognize, and precisely because it doesn't depend on circumstances anymore does it feel like safety—it cannot be compromised by anyone but yourself.

So, it is more than reasonable to conclude that an even deeper sense of safety could be achieved *while* these thoughts are now knocking at the *mental* door[26] when you're in seclusion, if you found a way to be confident that you will *not* open it no matter how much of a racket those thoughts make "outside" of it.

To accomplish this, it will be necessary to be clear on what exactly constitutes "opening the door", and what constitutes "noise outside" because given the subtlety of the distinction, one is guaranteed to confuse the former with the latter and vice versa in the beginning. *The "hints" won't be obvious.*

Let's take arguably the most relevant instance of a "door knocker", which is a thought of a beautiful object:

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[21] Abandoning of Sensuality is What Meditation Is

[22] See what ***precedes***, not ***results from***, practicing *sati* and *samādhi* in AN 8.63. Same in every Gradual Training sequence.

[23] *Sīlanussati:* One of the 4 recollections that recur throughout the Suttas, aimed at the abandonment of unwholesome states (cf. SN 9.11). The first of these, recollection of the Buddha, is often taken to be the repetition of the mantra "buddho". Does this mean the 4th, the recollection of virtue, simply entails using the word "sīlaṁ" as mantra instead? I think anyone familiar with the Suttas would agree that what follows below is more likely to be what the Buddha intended with those practices. If it were not, he could have saved a lot of time and simply focused on teaching how to use mantras or similar techniques properly, instead of leaving us with all these thousands of *contemplations*. Also, how exactly a mantra would lead to permanent freedom from *dukkha* is not evident here-&-now, as the Dhamma would always be.

[24] *Becoming Imperturbable*

[25] Note well: This does not mean one should *seek* to have more temptations to break precepts in one's environment—on the contrary. It just means that even after withdrawing as much as possible, temptations are bound to arise.

[26] This is really not optional in the way commonly assumed. The intention to stop one's thoughts *before* fully developing the the actual first *jhāna*, let alone before even *having* it, is always underlied by a subtler, peripheral, not *directly* noticeable intention of desire/aversion, which people generally would not see because they can't grasp the hints of such intentions and often aren't trying to. Even if one succeeds in supposedly "not thinking", that "little-yet-large" craving is lurking there and being blissfully ignored the whole time, no matter how much ecstatic pleasure is being felt. The proof is in how one would get even a tiny bit annoyed if the pleasure suddenly ceased, which wouldn't be the case with the pleasure of *utter indifference to all gain and loss* that comes with wholesome *samādhi*.

*"They are not sensuality, the pretty things **in the world**:*
*a person's sensuality is **volitional lust (saṅkapparāga)**;*
the pretty things remain just as they are in the world,
but the wise remove the desire for them."

-AN 6.63

But what does the Buddha mean by "the world"? Does he mean "out there in the city"?

Venerable sir, it is said, 'the world, the world.' In what way, venerable sir, might there be the world or the description of the world?"

"Where there is the eye, Samiddhi, where there are forms, eye-consciousness, things to be cognized by eye-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world.

"Where there is the ear … the mind, where there are mental phenomena, mind-consciousness, things to be cognized by mind-consciousness, there the world exists or the description of the world.

-SN 35.68

So then, it is *volitional lust* **towards** that which manifests within the world (the 6 sense bases) that constitutes sensuality. Anything less than this is just a "pretty thing in the world". But how would one pick up the "hint" of that *volitional lust?* Is it by whether the perception of the object is present *at all*? Would it be instead by the intensity of emotional pressure, the feeling that accompanies the thought? Would it be by the *possibilities*/intentions *(cetanā)* implied in it?[27]

Luckily, several Suttas give us the answer in different formulations but with the same meaning. Two examples should suffice:

At Sāvatthī. Sitting to one side, the Venerable Rādha said to the Blessed One: "Venerable sir, it said, 'Māra, Māra'. What now, venerable sir, is Māra?"

*"Form, Rādha, is Māra. **Feeling** … **Perception** … **Intentions** … Consciousness is Māra…*

-SN 23.12

*"The eye is mine, ascetic, forms are mine, **the base where eye-pressure is cognized**[28] **is mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?***

*The ear is mine, ascetic, sounds are mine … The nose is mine, ascetic, odours are mine … The tongue is mine, ascetic, tastes are mine … The body is mine, ascetic, tactile objects are mine … The mind is mine, ascetic, mental phenomena are mine, **the base where mind-pressure is cognized is mine. Where can you go, ascetic, to escape from me?"***

-SN 4.19

What these passages imply is that no amount of pressure, feeling or *suggested* actions that a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or thought brings with it can possibly be what lust is *in and of itself*, because if that were the case, there would be no escape from lust, no escape from Māra. Lust would *have to* arise without fail if certain feelings were to arise.[29] But luckily, this is not the case, and thus liberation is possible to begin with.

[27] The term "intention" *(cetanā* or *saṅkhāra)* denotes a *possibility* that a sense experience presents to act in some way. "Volition" is the choice to act upon those possibilities, similar in practice to *kamma,* except in the case of the Arahant. See further explanation on "mental action" below.

[28] Translating "*phassa*" as "pressure", a more practically useful rendering. Also note that feelings, perceptions, and intentions (*cetanā*) arise due to the base of *phassa.* Since *phassa* belongs to Māra, these 3 things must do so too

[29] It is not a coincidence that the tendency is to want to stop thinking, and in some cases shut down the 5 senses altogether (see AN 5.113). It is *because* one is too weak to endure the pressure that the objects exert that one wants to remove them, and a weak mind is a mind without *samādhi.* This, or one genuinely believes that the feeling accompanying the thought ***is*** the lust, which will make the cessation of lust impossible except by becoming a robot with "bare perceptions", a rather popular notion that is actually nonsensical. Note also that *vedanā* are not *sensations*, they are mental phenomena. *"Feeling, perception, and consciousness, friend—these phenomena are conjoined, not disjoined, and it is **impossible to separate each of these phenomena from the others** in order to describe the difference between them. For what one feels, that one perceives; and what one perceives, that one cognizes." —MN 43*

Rather, as the verse from AN 6.63 says, it is one's ***volitional lust***, one's *deliberate choice to accept* the presented possibilities to try to "release" the mental pressure that is the problem. Not the pressure, perceptions, feeling or the *suggestions* to act in and of themselves, no matter how they arise—these are just the "racket outside the door", the door that one can learn how to keep closed and remain safely behind, at ease. Besides:

> *"Then, engaging further in inward exploration, he explores thus: 'When this craving arises, where does it arise? When it settles down, upon what does it settle?'*
>
> *"As he explores, he understands thus: 'Whatever in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature: it is here that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. 'And what in the world has a pleasant and agreeable nature?* ***The eye*** *has a pleasant and agreeable nature in the world:* ***it is here*** *that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down. So too* ***the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind*** *have a pleasant and agreeable nature:* ***it is here*** *that this craving arises when it arises; it is here that it settles when it settles down.*
>
> -SN 12.66

Thus, it'd be wrong to think that abandonment and replacement of *sense objects,* including thoughts that arose on their own, is abandonment of craving.[30]

Now, continuing from where we left off, you are in seclusion now, away from people and distractions, plus you keep your virtue and sense restraint well and see the danger in the slightest fault, so you don't *do* anything lustful with your body and speech, and yet evidently the mind is still not free from lust. This is where "mental action" is taking place, the choice to "open the door" for the bandits waiting outside, which is still being overlooked.

The reason why the door is still "open" is because the mind *(citta)* still *values* the possibility of experiencing the pleasure that is being offered by the mind *(mano)*[31]. Thus, you are not *certain* in your internal renunciation of that *offered* pleasure, unlike in the domains of body and speech. This means that, even though you have developed restraint and are not specifically *planning* to pursue the pleasure through actions, the *citta* still holds, to some vague degree, that it would be "nice" to experience with the body this offer that *mano* is presenting. And that value of "nice" is where the unwholesome is, *not* in what is being presented. This is what the Suttas mean by "welcoming, delighting in, entertaining agreeable objects". The only proper solution to this is to abandon that *value*, that notion of "nice to get this", right where it is, without trying to prevent the *offer* and its pressuring feeling from being there—that feeling is *utterly inseparable from that perception,* as said above. Both the feeling and perception clearly have come, and will likely come again in the future, as a "bait" placed by Māra, and their presence is thus not in your ultimate control.

That "value" can be abandoned not by *choosing* to stop valuing the pleasure directly, but by clarifying and reflecting on the drawbacks of *accepting* the bait that is being presented to you.[32]

One does not need supramundane discernment to realize that *stepping into a trap* is never in one's best interests, no matter how good the bait in it is. Even if once you're inside, the hunter is nice enough to give you a few more treats, the fact is that *now you're in his control*, so if he ever feels like doing something bad to you, you have no way to stop it. And deep down you know, he *will* do so ultimately, at the latest when your sense bases, which you have been doubling down in regarding as yours and as dear by valuing their pleasures, begin to break apart.[33]

> *"Bhikkhus, in the Himalayas, the king of mountains, there are rugged and uneven zones where neither monkeys nor human beings can go; there are rugged and uneven zones where monkeys can go but not*

[30] This applies even if one is not fully trying to "stop thinking" or "concentrate", but still misusing Dhamma reflections to *prevent* thoughts arising on their own from exerting their respective pressure—still blaming the *hook* for the issue, not one's biting of it.

[31] In brief: *citta* (sometimes rendered "heart") is responsible for actions and all unwholesome states and is what needs to be purified, while *mano* (intellect), which is responsible for *dhammas* (thoughts / images), is Māra's property and is where he sets up his "bait". "Hint of the mind" refers to *citta*, not *mano*.

[32] The Danger Contemplation

[33] Incidentally, people in the Suttas often became *sotāpannas* as a result of the Buddha expounding the danger of sensuality, with the sort of reflections exemplified here, which freed their mind from hindrances, and *then* the Noble Truths. It was not because they had been doing "concentration" practices before.

human beings; there are even and delightful regions where both monkeys and human beings can go. There, along the monkey trails, hunters set out traps of pitch for catching monkeys.

"Those monkeys who are not foolish and frivolous, when they see the pitch, avoid it from afar. But a monkey who is foolish and frivolous approaches the pitch and seizes it with his hand; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free my hand,' he seizes it with his other hand; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free both hands,' he seizes it with his foot; he gets caught there. Thinking, 'I will free both hands and my foot,' he seizes it with his other foot; he gets caught there.' Thinking, 'I will free both hands and feet,' he applies his muzzle to it; he gets caught there.

"Thus, bhikkhus, that monkey, trapped at five points, lies there screeching. He has met with calamity and disaster and the hunter can do with him as he wishes. The hunter spears him, fastens him to that same block of wood, and goes off where he wants. So it is, bhikkhus, when one strays outside one's own resort into the domain of others.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, do not stray outside your own resort into the domain of others. Māra will gain access to those who stray outside their own resort into the domain of others; Māra will get a hold on them.

"And what is not a bhikkhu's own resort but ***the domain of others?*** *It is the five cords of sensuality. This is what is not a bhikkhu's own resort but the domain of others."*

-SN 47.7[34]

At Sāvatthī. "Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases. With craving, assumption is; with assumption, being is; with being, birth is; with birth, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair exist. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

"Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and a man would pour oil into it and adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, sustained by that oil, fuelled by it, that oil lamp would burn for a very long time. So too, when one lives contemplating gratification in things that can fetter, craving increases…. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering.

"Bhikkhus, when one dwells contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases. Without craving, there is no assumption; without assumption, there is no being… no birth … aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair do not exist. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

"Suppose, bhikkhus, an oil lamp was burning in dependence on oil and a wick, and the man would not pour oil into it or adjust the wick from time to time. Thus, when the former supply of fuel is exhausted, that oil lamp, not being fed with any more fuel, lacking sustenance, would be extinguished. So too, when one lives contemplating danger in things that can fetter, craving ceases…. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering."

-SN 12.53

It must be emphasized that the purpose of this contemplation of danger is not to get rid of the arisen *thought*, but to address one's inability to remain *internally* unmoved by its alluring nature. It is because you are *emotionally bothered* by that "itch" that you relish the prospect of getting it "scratched'. But in and of itself, no amount of itch *requires* scratching. One's mind not being free from lust, infected with distorted notions, is what *assumes* that scratching is"necessary". Also, notice how in the above Sutta, the man simply *refrains* from doing what would cause the lamp to burn longer than it should on its own. He doesn't *manually* try to get the oil out or put out the fire. This is the only way to abandon an unwholesome state without generating another.

If you were to maintain this context of "danger" on the *right level* long enough, where that "scratch" is being *desired* instead of where the "itch" i[35]s, you would at some point realize that the *same itch* is no longer

[34]The Monkey Trap Sutta

[35]Compare with the simile given in SN 12.66: The problem is *never* that the poisonous drink is tasty and agreeable, nor that it's being offered— the problem is when *you* lose perspective and want to drink it.

unpleasant[36] because you no longer *feel a need* to scratch it, not because you got rid of it by force. Rather than being a threat, the "itch", which is not bothering you at all anymore, will now serve to remind you of your state of safety from the *need* to scratch, as if you're now free from debt, illness, imprisonment, slavery or managed to cross a desert. That sense of safety is a wholesome joy (and notice that you haven't stopped thinking). Because, how can you say "I am safe" unless you're safe *from something?* What's more, how can that safety and the joy arising from it become the central theme of your experience, your *abiding* as said in the Suttas, unless that which was a threat before is still being equally *recognized?* Forgetting about the threat would mean forgetting about the safety, even in mundane terms. This is why one who succeeds in this practice fully and disengages from sensuality correctly has "blindfolded" Māra:

> *"And where is it that Māra and his following cannot go? Here, having fully disengaged from sensuality, fully disengaged from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure born of disengagement. This bhikkhu is said to have blindfolded Māra[37], to have become invisible to the Evil One by depriving Māra's eye of its opportunity."*
>
> -MN 25

It is precisely because you **don't** prevent Māra from setting up his bait (which is none other than the pressure of the six sense bases) that he is confused and at a loss. Before this point, it had always been a *guaranteed* catch every time he set up the trap, given that even when you tried to avoid it before, you went overboard and attempted to *get rid* of the trap, by trying to get rid of the mental pressure—stop thinking, concentrate twice as hard hard on your abdomen or tip of your nose, etc.[38] Therefore, you always *touched* the trap either to eat the bait or to throw it away, and that's all the hunter needed to get you. But now, you are learning to not *take* the bait, nor try to *remove* it either. This is, contrary to one's distorted gut-feeling, is the only way to stay safe:

> *"How, dear sir, did you cross the flood?"*
> *"By not halting, friend, and by not struggling I crossed the flood."*
> *"But how is it, dear sir, that by not halting and by not straining you crossed the flood?"*
> *"When I halted, friend, then I sank; but when I struggled, then I got swept away. It is in this way, friend, that by not halting and by not struggling I crossed the flood."*
>
> -SN 1.1

That same reflection and attitude is to be applied to any other hindrance, irrespective of its peculiarities. This is because they all share the same nature of that "itch" or pressure, that "trap" which one will *automatically* fall for if unclear about where the line is and how to not cross it. Lack of clarity and perspective means *already* being trapped within a hindrance. Displeasure and annoyance are the second kind of "trap", which one must learn to "see through" and contemplate so as to see that the problem is one's subtle need to *act out of it*, which is what ill-will is. Same for the other 3 hindrances. All of them are actually different symptoms of the *same thing*.[39]

For this reason, if one simply learns to see "mental pressure" or "impulses" in the most general sense, even without classifying it into a particular hindrance, and learns to *neither act* out of that impulse *nor* prevent it from being where it is (a subtler way of acting out of it), then the entire *domain* of unwholesome, the domain of *kamma* and thus all suffering and adversity, can be surmounted one day. And this is the same principle that virtue is based upon—one does not accept the impulse to act out, nor does one prevent it from arising.

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[36] But you must also not be *anticipating* that result and getting anxious to get it, because this would be a subtler form of still craving for pleasure and against pain. Wanting is to be completely abandoned *beforehand,* and the "itch" must be endured without expecting a reward at the end. *Samādhi* will not take care of your own craving for you, as is often hoped. *Samādhi* is the *result* of not acting out of craving, expectations and worries on any level.

[37] Isn't it strange that "meditation" tends to involve "blindfolding" *oneself* by going into a trance, rather than blindfolding Māra? Note that indeed, the second jhāna *is* the cessation of thinking and pondering, but that is something that is *built upon the basis* of the pristine clarity of thinking of the first *jhāna*. So it's not "blindfolding" oneself at all, but developing *even more* clarity of the nature of Māra's traps. It's then even harder to foolishly overlook and fall for them in the future.

[38] *Asubha* contemplation also tends to be misused to *get rid of the bait,* not to simply make sure to not eat it. Another way of grabbing it and being caught. On Asubha

[39] *The Truth About the Five Hindrances*

This "enduring" of mental pressure (*with the right perspective*, not just "mindless bearing") that is required to abandon the five hindrances is the common thread to *jhāna* and Nibbāna, which would have to culminate in the latter eventually when paired with correct views and instructions. This is how Right Composure *factually* inclines the mind towards Nibbāna.[40] Nibbāna is not about discovering a hidden experiential truth through an esoteric revelation or experience, but about perfect immovability, and thus *peace,* in the face of anything that can arise in one's experience. And with this, lust, aversion and delusion, and the fetters of self-view, conceit and ignorance are destroyed, because their *raison d'être* is gone—the constant, futile attempt to outrrun the pressure of the senses.

> *"The eye, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person; its current consists of forms.*
>
> *One who **endures (sahati)** that impulse (vega) consisting of forms is said to have crossed the ocean of the eye with its waves, whirlpools, sharks, and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, **the brahmin stands on high ground.***
>
> *"The ear, bhikkhus, is the ocean for a person…. The mind is the ocean for a person; its current consists of mental phenomena. One who **endures** that impulse of mental phenomena is said to have crossed the ocean of the mind with its waves, whirlpools, sharks and demons. Crossed over, gone beyond, the brahmin stands on high ground."*
>
> -SN 35.228 (*cf* AN 6.55)
>
> *Patient **endurance (khanti)** is the highest austerity*
> *Nibbāna is the highest, say the Buddhas*
> *For one gone forth does not hurt another;*
> *Disturbing another, one is not a samaṇa.*[41]
>
> -Dhammapada 184
>
> *"It is said, friend, 'nibbāna, nibbāna' In what way has the Blessed One spoken of nibbāna?"*
>
> *"Here, friend, having fully disengaged from sensuality… a bhikkhu dwells having entered the first jhāna …. To this extent, too, the Blessed One has spoken of nibbāna **in a certain** sense** …*
>
> *–AN 9.48 (see the other Suttas in this chapter)*[42]
>
> *"I'm **not afraid of fear**.*
> *Our teacher is skilled in **the deathless**;*
> *Monks proceed by the path*
> *Where fear cannot land on."*
>
> *–Theragātha* 21

It should now be evident that abandoning these subtle mental attitudes and escaping Māra's traps in the right way would never be possible if a person is still falling for the obvious traps with their body and speech. No amount of effort in meditation would be able to make up for the fact that their *actions* are still infected with lust, aversion, and distraction.

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[40] SN 53.1

[41] It's not a coincidence that "patient endurance" appears in the first line and Nibbāna in the second. It's not *just* talking about everyday "patience" and resilience. Also, one "does not disturb", or argue even with Māra, trying to get him to stop putting up his traps in the six sense base that is rightly his. In this way, one can truly abandon all craving: *"Friend, I assert and proclaim [my teaching] in such a way that one does not quarrel with **anyone** in the world with its gods, its **Māras**, and its Brahmās, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people; in such a way that perceptions no more underlie that brahmin who abides **detached from sensual pleasures**, without perplexity, devoid of worry, free from craving for any kind of being." — MN 18*

[42] This goes to show how even the first *jhāna* is something ***way*** more profound than it is usually given credit for contemporarily, often by putting too much weight on how *jhāna* is *technically* still not completely outside the realm of being (bhava). This is true from an *Arahant's* point of view, but for the ordinary person who is not even accomplished in virtue and still relishes sensual pleasures, the first *jhāna* taught by the Buddha is, for all intents and purposes, close to Nibbāna—an *extinguishment* of their deeply rooted *sensual being (kāmabhava).* To illustrate, a 60 year old has all the right to call a 30 year old a "kid", but for a 6 year old child, both of the adults deserve almost the same respect. And indeed, there are cases in the Suttas such as that of Devadatta who had *jhānas*, but such people make history for a reason.

Māra doesn't care how well you can perform a mechanical mental exercise and how much pleasure it provides you with. All that matters to him is, you still *could* bite the hook. For as long as that's the case, he's got you already. This is why *actions* by body, speech and mind are what enables the five hindrances, and thus ignorance, to thrive, and not one's lack of skill in repetitive techniques, "energy blockages" in one's body or mind, lack of merit from past lives, or anything else that distracts one away from starting to restrain those actions.

> *Just as, when it is raining and the rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountaintop, the water flows down along the slope and fills the clefts, gullies, and creeks; and these then fill up the pools; these fill up the lakes … streams … rivers; and these then fill up the great ocean; thus there is nutriment for the great ocean, and in this way it becomes full. So too, not associating with superior persons fills up not hearing the true Dhamma; not hearing the true Dhamma fills up lack of faith… lack of ayoniso manasikāra … lack of recollectedness and clear comprehension… non-restraint of the senses… the three kinds of misconduct…* ***the three kinds of misconduct fill up the five hindrances****; the five hindrances fill up ignorance. Thus there is nutriment for ignorance, and in this way it becomes full.*
>
> -AN 10.61

To sum up, the right kind of composure is in having the mental strength to not take Māra's bait without needing to shun it either, and developing the right kind of unwavering virtue is the first, indispensable step in that same direction.

Some more teachings on this proper practice of virtue and how it develops the mind:

- Essay: Intentions Behind One's
- Essay: The Necessity of Celibacy
- Purpose of the Precepts
- Importance of the Precepts — Looking for a Bigger Picture
- How Virtue Leads to Effortless Samādhi
- Relieving the Pressure of Restraint
- Jhāna is Virtue
- Forsaking the pleasure of "meditation"
- Making the World a Better Place
- Right Speech, Right Samādhi
- Sense Restraint is not Just for Monks
- Nibbāna, Right Speech, Virtuous Behavior
- Sense Restraint
- Responsibility can free you from suffering
- Q&A on Jhāna, Anxiety, Precepts
- Gateway to Nibbāna
- BOOK: The Only Way to Jhāna

Seeing A Body Within The Body

******By Bhikkhu Anīgha******

> *"Bhikkhus, this is the one-way path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realisation of Nibbāna—namely, the Four Foundations of Recollection.*
>
> *"What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating* ******a body within the body (kāye kāyānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contemplating* ******a feeling within feelings******** (vedanāsu vedanānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contemplating* ******a mind within the mind******** (citte cittānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world. He abides contem-

plating* ******a phenomenon within phenomena******** (dhammesu dhammānupassī)*******, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having curbed longing and aversion for the world*.

—MN 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

In every conceivable experience, there are phenomena that are "farther" and phenomena that are "closer". For an undeveloped mind, what is "closer", more subtle, less defined and *less changeable* tends to be regarded as "me" and "mine", given that it's not even seen and is taken for granted, and attention rests on what is "over there" in the form of sense objects and the world. The usual way of practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* which involves keeping one's attention on bodily sensations and *objects* of various kinds, only serves to maintain this lack of development of the mind, and all the *seemingly* beneficial results it may provide will still be obtained within the framework that puts "me" at the center of experience, and thus are not truly beneficial in the quest for the freedom from suffering.[43]

Instead, the goal of right recollection (*sati*) is to establish and sustain the memory of a more accurate picture, that does not *overlook* that which is "closer", and takes into account its true nature of being liable to change and deterioration, just like everything that is "further away" from the point of view.

Seeing a "a body[1] within the body[2]", as the *satipaṭṭhāna* refrain goes, and which has been translated in a myriad ways that *miss the* ******central******* point,* means that you see your experience as a whole at any time, the entire six-sense field, as a body[2] that is less fundamental, secondary to body[1]. "Within" means just that: body[1] is at the "center" of body[2], because it's more primordial.

Body[1] can be anything that is a simultaneous foundation or necessary basis for body[2], which is whatever aspect of the body you see, use, and are attached to, as well as anything in the world you perceive. Most importantly, this body[2] is what your sense of self can call "me" and "mine". Body[1] is the material things that determine your body[2], such as your organs, the Four Great Elements, your breathing, or material "stuff" that is no more special than that which makes up a corpse (the practices mentioned under Body Contemplation in MN 10).

An analogy to illustrate the relationship between these "two bodies" can be made by borrowing from science for a moment. At the center of each galaxy, there is a black hole which the other celestial bodies orbit around, owing to the black hole's immense gravitational pull. But this black hole cannot be *seen* or measured directly. Rather, the presence of the black hole is *implied* in the movement of the surrounding stars and planets. But, if unaware of the existence of black holes or how they work, one will have to *assume* that there is some mysterious force orchestrating all that movement. Similarly, whenever you don't indirectly *know* the presence of the true "center" of experience—of body[1], which equally cannot be perceived directly because that would put it within body[2]—then you are *already assuming* your sense of self to be that center, or the orchestrator of the movements, and this is the perpetual state of whoever lacks the Right View. For as long as you don't discern body[1] *within* body[2], which is what makes you a *sotāpanna*, your contemplation that "this is impermanent" or "this is not mine" is, to extend the analogy, just another star that you regard as orbiting around ******you******.

In the case of feeling, there's always a feeling in your experience that's more "central" than all the others, which are comparatively fleeting. An example of this is when you've having a good day, and all the particular things you encounter, some of which may be quite unpleasant, don't disturb you as much. Conversely, when that general feeling is unpleasant, even the things that would usually give you joy fail to do so.

If you see that at the core of all those other more particular feelings, determining them, lies that more primary feeling, you don't then need to go and "manually" remove the sense of ownership and tell yourself that this or that feeling is not yours. None of it will be yours because you're no longer the "center" whether you like it or not, but rather that "core" feeling is (and always was), since it is because of it that all the other particular feelings either pleased you or bothered you, regardless of your desire to always be pleased.

[43] Contrary to popular belief, *anattā* is not about there being no center to the experience and no individuality, in which case stark differences in character between two *Arahants* would be inexplicable. It's about the fact that the "center" is *not yours, not in your control.*

With "a mind within the mind", it's the same. A more primordial state of mind always *simultaneously* underlies all the more particular moods that may arise, and so you must discern that at the "core" of all the other moods and emotions that you're experiencing. Particularly relevant in this case is, as the *satipaṭṭhāna* Sutta describes, recognizing a mind that is either affected with or free from lust, aversion, and delusion. This is how you would begin to see what actually determines something as unwholesome, which is when that "core" has lust, aversion and delusion in it and you're taking it for granted and acting out of it. Without seeing that "center" as that which determines your more particular experiences and actions, you would fall into the common idea that it's the way you move, talk and the specific thoughts you're having which serve as the criteria for what is unwholesome. You could then become perfectly restrained, gentle and polite in your outward expression, even never really have lustful or hateful thoughts, but you would fail to see that at the "center" of *all that* is a state of mind affected with craving whose sway you are still under.

With *dhammas* it's more varied, but to give an example, you would see the sense bases as the "center" and everything else as surrounding that. Only by not seeing that that's the actual center that is just being "hit" by sense objects, and thus automatically *being* the center oneself, can there be lust or aversion towards sense experiences. And that's also how the hindrances work: they hinder you because you don't even recognize their "center", thus everything you do is blindly going with the grain of those hindrances, even the Dhamma practice. It's not because of the center itself or what "surrounds" that center, which is why it's futile to try to stop one's thinking, concentrate on something else, etc., intentionally arouse feelings of joy, etc.[44]

> *And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects? Here a bhikkhu abides contemplating a phenomenon within phenomena in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a bhikkhu abide contemplating a phenomenon within phenomena in terms of the five hindrances? Here, there being sensual desire* ******internally*******, a bhikkhu understands: 'There is sensual desire *****internally*******'; or there being no sensual desire *****internally*******, he understands: 'There is no sensual desire *****internally*******'; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of unarisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of abandoned sensual desire. [and so on for the rest]'*
>
> —MN 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

When that simultaneous *relationship* is seen,[45] whether in terms of the body, feelings, mind or phenomena, it becomes inconceivable to exercise a sense of ownership over *both* thing[1] and thing[2], the sum of which nothing can possibly be outside of. You now see that *you* cannot be that center even if you wanted to, and body[1], which is clearly not yours, becomes the "center" instead. Same principle applies to the other *satipaṭṭhānas.* They render ownership redundant and inconceivable.

This "ownership becoming inconceivable" point cannot be emphasized enough, given that it's possible for people to think that, because they can now apparently overcome the sense of self by "applying" some practice, they therefore have right mindfulness or became *sotāpannas.* This is not it. It is entirely out of the question for the assumption of self and its associated suffering to ever arise again if "body within the body", etc., has been understood—*even* if one doesn't do any meditation for the rest of one's life[46]. This is precisely the reason that the Buddha had to constantly urge Noble disciples not to become complacent, which would be unimaginable for one whose idea of *sati* hinges on habits and practices (*sīlabbataparāmāsa),* without which the progress they made collapses. The capacity to see "a body within the body" makes such things lose all importance.

"But, venerable sir, in what way can a bhikkhu be called skilled in what is possible and what is impossible?"

"Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right

[44] See relevant talk: Seeing Through The Hindrances Instead of Denying Them

[45] Relationship which will only be obscured by focusing on an object. This would only serve to sustain the sense of **me** being at the core of the experience and looking at it.

[46] This is a good litmus test for the Right View and Right Recollection: if you put aside ******everything****** you've learned about the Dhamma and all the information, habits, and practices you've acquired, and abandon all efforts, including your "formal meditation", is there room to doubt that your inability to suffer and recognition of the nature of things will remain untouched? If yes, then whatever it is, it's still not the Noble *sati* that was developed, and it's important to remind oneself of that as often as possible.

view could view any formation as permanent—there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view some formation as permanent—there is such a possibility.' He understands: 'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could view any formation as pleasurable—there is no such possibility.' And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view some formation as pleasurable—there is such a possibility.' He understands: ******'It is impossible, it cannot happen that a person possessing right view could view anything as self—there is no such possibility.'****** *And he understands: 'It is possible that an ordinary person might view something as self—there is such a possibility.'*

—MN 115, The Various Elements

Being able to see a body within the body, a feeling within feelings, a mind within the mind, and a phenomenon within phenomena is also what puts an end to the four fundamental assumptions in regard to the aggregates, one of which a *puthujjana* will inevitably have at any given time.

"How, householder, is one afflicted in body and afflicted in mind? Here, householder, the uninstructed worldling, who is not a seer of the Noble ones and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, who is not a seer of superior persons and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma, ******regards form as self, or self as possessing form, or form as within self, or self as within form.******* He lives stuck in the notions: 'I am form, form is mine.'*

As he lives stuck in these notions, that form of his changes and alters. With the change and alteration of form, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. He regards feelings… perceptions… intentions… consciousness…"

—SN 22.1, Nakula's Father

On the other hand, the instructed Noble disciple, the stream-enterer or higher, is "well-instructed" and "Noble" because they've seen that what is "within" form[2] cannot be anything but form[1], and that *even* if they chose to embrace either of them and call it "mine and mine alone", it would not actually be *assumed (upādāna)* as such on the level that matters, because, even in a mundane sense, assuming things is made possible only by the lack of knowledge. Once you *know*, you cannot fool yourself again even if you try.

"Then, Bāhiya, you should train yourself thus: Within the seen, there will be only the seen. Within the heard, only the heard. Within the sensed, only the sensed. Within the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself. When for you there is only the seen within the seen, only the heard within the heard, only the sensed within the sensed, only the cognized within the cognized, then, Bāhiya, you will not be "that by which" [the "center"; the master]. When you are not "that by which", there is no "you" there. When there is no "you" there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two. This itself is the end of suffering."

Through hearing this brief explanation of the Dhamma from the Blessed One, the mind of Bāhiya of the Bark-cloth right then and there was released from the outflows through non-assumption.

—Udāna 1.10, Bāhiya Sutta

The well-known "in the seen just the seen"[47] employs the same concept of something being "inside" of something else. One must learn to see that that inner "center", where the notion of self gets established, is actually nothing more than a bundle of subtler phenomena that pertain to—and thus **depend** on and could not have arisen without[48]—what is seen. And, in turn, the seen would not be intelligible without these subtler phenomena that are "further back". These phenomena are simply less palpable, less defined thoughts, intentions, feelings, notions, memories, views, ideas, expectations, etc., which *arise as such.* If you actually

[47] This has nothing to do with the celebrated and fallacious idea of "bare perceptions", often linked with the practice of "noting" and similar, which is underlain by the wrong view that liberation is when parts of the aggregates have been magically deleted, and there are only the "pure sensations" and "pure present moment" left, as if everything else — namely thoughts, intentions, plans, preferences, concepts, ideas — was ever in itself an issue. Ironically, it is also that "everything else" that distinguishes us from animals, and gives us the ability to develop wisdom in the first place.

[48] All that's explained in this essay is synonymous with seeing *paṭiccasamuppāda,* the principle of simultaneous dependence. It's no coincidence that acquiring *sammāsati* is synonymous with seeing the Dhamma. "Whoever sees *paṭiccasamuppāda* sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees *paṭiccasamuppāda*"— MN 28.

discern that that more ambiguous "center" is also a manifest *thing(s)*, just subtler and on a different plane than the sense objects are, it becomes unthinkable to be the owner of the seen, despite the fact that there are very much still these less-palpable background things you ******used to****** assume as "mine" associated with the sights, that arise as "closer" than the sights themselves.

Learn how to see these background things as the center that your sights "orbit" around instead of trying to descend onto the "bare perceptions" of "raw sense data", which is, to return to the previous analogy, akin to focusing your efforts on the things orbiting the black hole rather than on your ignorance of it.

Lastly, what allows one to truly see those two simultaneous planes and thus get the Right View, be it in terms of the four *satipaṭṭhānas* or "the seen within the seen", is to have been practicing the Gradual Training—living virtuously, withdrawn from sensuality and not delighting in the company of others—for a long time. Unrestrained actions ("me here" seeking the pleasant objects "yonder") and unnecessary company ("me here" and other people "yonder") automatically abolish right perspective and maintain the sense of self: the notion of ******me****** being the center, pressured to act towards the things "around me". It is because people continue reinforcing the sense of self through such actions that they then feel the need to *abolish* the "center" altogether when it's time to practice, and are thus unable to see the Middle Way, devoting themselves to the hopeless battle of denial instead, which can only provide trivial, temporary rewards.

> *The four establishments of mindfulness, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the four establishments of mindfulness? It should be said: the three kinds of good conduct. The three kinds of good conduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of good conduct? It should be said: restraint of the sense faculties*
>
> —AN 10.61, Ignorance

> *Bhikkhus, (1) it is impossible that a bhikkhu who delights in company, who is delighted with company, who is devoted to delight in company; who delights in a group, who is delighted with a group, who is devoted to delight in a group, will find delight in solitude when he is alone. (2) It is impossible that one who does not find delight in solitude when he is alone will acquire the hint of the mind. (3) It is impossible that one who does not acquire the hint of the mind will fulfill the Right View. (4) It is impossible that one who does not fulfill the Right View will fulfill Right Composure. (5) It is impossible that one who does not fulfill Right Composure will abandon the fetters. (6) Without having abandoned the fetters, it is impossible that one will realize Nibbāna.*
>
> —AN 6.68, Delight in Company

"' wp-block-verse Note: This way of explaining "body within body" is an equivalent alternative to the way used in my essay "The Meaning of Yoniso Manasikāra" and generally in the Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talks. I opted for this different way of describing the "within" aspect this time around given that it corresponds to the Pāli more literally. However, there is absolutely no relevant difference in the meaning conveyed, and in both paradigms what is actually being pointed at is the simultaneous principle that underlies one's whole experience and undermines one's ownership of it, discerning which the view of self would not be able to find room where there isn't any. "'

WHAT THE JHĀNAS ACTUALLY ARE

By Bhikkhu Anīgha

A Glaring Discrepancy

One of the most notable differences among today's Buddhist teachers and traditions is their interpretation of the *jhānas,* as well as the practices that they assert are the way to achieve them. The mutual gaps between these views are particularly wide when it comes to the first *jhāna,* due to varying ideas of what the Pali term *vitakkavicāra* refers to, the characteristic factor of the initial and arguably most crucial establishment of mind, given that all the subsequent *jhānas* are, in a manner of speaking, successive refinements of the first. The first *jhāna* that the Suttas describe is also perfectly sufficient for Arahantship (MN 64 & AN 9.36).

The foremost, generally unquestioned assumption about the practice of *jhāna* (and mental cultivation in general) is that one or another form of continuous attention upon one object is necessary, and this itself rests on the idea that *samādhi* is a state of focused attention. For this reason, the term *jhāna* has frequently been interpreted as "absorption". The reality is, however, that such practice is not discussed, let alone *encouraged*, anywhere in the Suttas. It does not correspond to any Pali term in the early texts, and is invariably being read into them and justified heuristically, if at all. In fact, the word *jhāna* has an unambiguous meaning both in Pali and Sanskrit: thinking, contemplating, reflecting—*meditating*.[49]

The average person who is told to "meditate" would instead proceed to try to "empty their mind", become hyper-aware of bodily sensations, and breathe deeply to achieve a bodily relaxation akin to what a massage provides. The more serious teachers and practices would then expand upon this, often in meticulous detail and with various nuances, slap Buddhist concepts and terminology into it after the fact, and present the final product as the core of the way towards *Nibbāna*.

Why It Exists, And Why It Shouldn't

These distorted ideas have come about due to the fact that what is widely thought of today as Buddhist meditation is, at best, for those who label themselves Early Buddhists, the result of rejecting only *some* parts of the overall framework put forth by later Buddhist Schools, the Theravada Commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga*, often unaware that the largest of all the elephants remains in the room. At worst, some base their views on later interpretations without a second thought. In either case, the premise that the gist of mental cultivation is concentration upon objects is rarely challenged, despite the critical Western attitude often being willing to strip basically everything else away from Buddhism.[50]

It is overlooked that if one were to have a person wholly unfamiliar with meditation and Buddhist ideas—say, an average European from the 18th century equipped with a perfectly literal Pali dictionary, who will take what they read on its own terms and not those of Christianity or any other religion—read through the collection of early texts exclusively, without being told what they mean in advance (as most of us today are way before we actually read them), there is simply no way that they would come to the conclusion that the Buddhist path to liberation centers around stopping one's thinking and/or watching bodily sensations. But modern practitioners, by the time they bother to read the Suttas (if they ever do), are already quite invested in that overall direction due to having had previous success with a contemporary "meditation" technique. This results in them inadvertently only being open to (mis)reading the Suttas in ways that support or at least do not invalidate what they have circumstantially come to regard as the Dhamma.

Instead, this individual of a previous era who is free from such biases and conflicts of interest would likely conclude, judging by the sheer frequency of mentions, that the Buddha's main injunction is to *meditate* diligently (in the right sense of the word) on what is beneficial (*kusala*) and what is unbeneficial (*akusala*), and that the cultivation of the former and abandoning of the latter is done first and foremost through undertaking the precepts and restraint in regard to one's desires, and moreover, by *meditating* on the unreliable and perilous nature of everything that one is, to one's own detriment, emotionally dependent on—particularly sensual pleasures. And this would be a merely intellectual yet authentic and undistorted conclusion by someone who still has no plan to actually implement those teachings.

> *Having abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom,* ******quite******* *******withdrawn from sensuality*******, withdrawn from unwholesome states, he abides having entered

[49] The original meaning of this word makes it an excellent translation for "*jhāyati/jhāna*". Unfortunately, however, since the advent of concentration-centric meditation techniques in the West, the term has acquired alien connotations to its original latin etymology of *meditārī* ("to ponder on, to think over, consider"). More often than not, it is used to refer to the exact opposite effort: *stopping* one's thinking and consideration, "cutting off the narrative" in one's mind, and focusing instead on bodily sensations or similar "more real" phenomena. The state thought of as *jhāna* (again, "meditation") that results from this repetitive focusing and re-focusing is then, contradictorily, the *inability* to meditate, and provides one a sense of peace more akin to a blissful oblivion than that of abandoning passion for sense experiences through *meditating* on their true nature, which is what results in the first *jhāna*.

[50] The emphasis on mechanical focusing techniques is invariably what survives even in the most "secular" presentations of Buddhist meditation, and it's also what mystics in eternalist religions would tend to practice, just with a different accessory narrative underpinning the need for focusing on the chosen object. It would follow that these mystics are not *that* far away from *sammāsamādhi* despite often engaging in wrong action and wrong livelihood, as are many who are fervently devoted to Buddhist meditation techniques too, unaware of the inherent contradiction.

the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thinking and pondering, with joy and pleasure born of seclusion.*

—*MN 39, Great Discourse at Assapura*

*And how, bhikkhus, are sensual pleasures seen by a bhikkhu in such a way that as he looks at them***** s*******ensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures?* ******Suppose there is a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals without flame or smoke.******* A man would come along wanting to live, not wanting to die, desiring happiness and averse to suffering. Then two strong men would grab him by both arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. The man would wriggle his body this way and that. For what reason? Because he knows: 'I will fall into this charcoal pit and I will thereby meet death or deadly suffering.' So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has seen sensual pleasures as similar to a charcoal pit, sensual desire, sensual affection, sensual infatuation, and sensual passion do not lie latent within him in regard to sensual pleasures. *****(********i.e. he is able to establish the first jhāna.)******

"*And how, bhikkhus, has a bhikkhu comprehended a mode of conduct and manner of dwelling in such a way that as he conducts himself thus and as he dwells thus, evil unbeneficial states of longing and aversion do not flow in upon him* ******[which would obstruct jhāna]*******? Suppose a man would enter a thorny forest. There would be thorns in front of him, thorns behind him, thorns to his left, thorns to his right, thorns below him, thorns above him. He would go forward mindfully, he would go back mindfully, thinking, 'May no thorn prick me!' So too, bhikkhus, whatever in the world has a pleasing and agreeable nature is called a thorn in the Noble One's Discipline. Having understood this thus as 'a thorn', restraint and non-restraint should be understood.*

—*SN 35.244, Things that Entail Suffering*

******(Ānāpāna)sati**** is… "Observation"?**

Another cause of the widespread misconceptions about what meditation and *jhānas* are is the centrality given to what can be called "breath observation", which means that virtually any other practice is done in a manner analogous to it, i.e., by *focusing* on something, even if it's not static, such as a changing stream of bodily sensations or images of people one is radiating loving-kindness towards—in the end it's still done with the purpose of *narrowing down* one's awareness, however much the degree of narrow-ness varies.

The point here is not that *ānāpānāsati* is wrong, but that *observing sensations* of breathing, being either at one single point or throughout one's whole body, or whatever arbitrary variation of this "observing", is ******not****** what *ānāpānāsati* is, nor does it have anything to do with *sati* in general.

Ānāpānāsati is mentioned only a handful of times in the Suttas compared to the types of contemplations mentioned in the previous quoted passage, and there is ample reason to believe that a vast number of monastic disciples[51] had never received detailed instruction on it, if at all. Therefore, instead of taking *ānāpānāsati* and the modern ideas of it as the starting point, one should actually interpret *ānāpānāsati* in the light of the other comparatively enormous bulk of *right reflections* aimed at understanding[52] the nature of things that the Buddha left behind, which are instead seen as *supplementary*, if at all considered. On top of this, the standard contemplation that is given in the context of *jhāna* is not *ānāpānasati*, but the recognition of the drawbacks of sensuality and its concomitant unbeneficial states. Thus, when you have *pondered/meditated on* the drawbacks of sensuality correctly, your mind abides having entered the meditation / **state-of-comprehension** (*jhāna*)[53] that sees sensuality as a "charcoal pit", and is accompanied by profound joy, pleasure and *relief* born of the

[51] There are no recorded instances of the Buddha teaching *ānāpānasati* to even his most devoted lay disciples who were stream-enterers. The authentic *ānāpānasati* presupposes a willingness to renounce *everything*, given that it's an acute contemplation of non-control and impermanence. Hence the *Ānāpānasati Sutta, MN 118,* was received by a group exclusively consisting of attained *bhikkhus*.

[52] The *ānāpānāsati Sutta* itself instructs one to *understand (pajānāti,* which is no less than the verb form of *paññā)* one's act of breathing and the (un-ownable) body that's revealed indirectly by it. This would lead to the same result as other contemplations like the recollection of death—complete dispassion towards existence that is greatly peaceful, unburdening and joyful for one who *values it*. And this is what the *jhānas* are, not sudden meditative experiences which are accessible to people who are not dispassionate if they just get lucky or do the right technique at the right time.

[53] This would be an accurate rendering of the term. See further below on how "comprehension" differs from liberative insight.

safety from those burning embers. In this way, to use an analogy, planting **apple** seeds—not *something else*—provides you with an apple tree, and apples eventually.

Coherent, Doable, Free From "Patchwork"

When *jhāna*/meditation is understood in this way throughout, *everything* in the 4 Nikāyas forms a coherent whole, and one does away with the otherwise lurking implication that the Buddha spent decades traveling far and wide teaching things that were only secondarily relevant compared to the supposed crux of the matter, which is absorption into bodily sensations with little to no thinking. Given that he tirelessly instructed people to be diligent and meditate ardently, it would follow that they would not be able to even make use of the vast array of discursive reflections he taught if the practice is about rendering oneself *unable to meditate* as much as possible. Instead, he would've been much better off leaving behind something more akin to a modern meditation manual and calling it a day, given that he was already not too eager to teach when asked to soon after his enlightenment.

We also do away with the notion that meditation, *jhāna* and enlightenment by extension, and dealing with day-to-day affairs are fundamentally at odds,[54] which is certainly the case when your idea of "deep *samādhi*" requires you to not skip a beat in your alertness to every moment and (supposedly) not engage with concepts to sustain it—essentially tying you down more than it's freeing you.

What *jhāna* practice *does* demand from you without exception is that you completely abandon *delight* in the five cords of sensual pleasure (not become unaware of them)—physically, verbally, and mentally—spend the majority of your time away from the presence of others, and refrain from using company as a form of entertainment when you do meet people due to practical necessities. This is exactly why the Suttas go on incessantly about the need for withdrawal from sensuality and seclusion from company—valuable space that could've been used to, *at least once*, mention these special object-observation techniques that magically bypass that need, making *samādhi* accessible to anyone who simply devotes time to them regularly, rendering monasticism effectively unnecessary except for the odd person who is perhaps too zealous about the practice.

> *Bhikkhus, without having abandoned six things, one is* ******incapable******* of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, doubt; and* ******not having clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is, the danger in sensual pleasures.******* Without having abandoned these six things, one is incapable of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna.*
>
> *Bhikkhus, having abandoned six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna. What six? Sensual desire … not having clearly seen with correct wisdom, as it really is, the danger in sensual pleasures. Having abandoned these six things, one is capable of entering and dwelling in the first jhāna."*
>
> *—AN 6.73, On The First Jhāna*

With all this in mind, we can go on to elaborate further on the nature of the four "pleasant abidings here-&-now" and how contemplation done rightly and persistently naturally results in them, with no need for extraneous props.

******Meditation**** is Concrete Thinking**

To start off with, the first thing one is likely to wonder is what is the difference between the practice of meditation in this correct sense, and rehearsing abstract ideas and views one has read or heard about, which clearly anyone can do without experiencing the wholesome joy of relief from all that is unwholesome. The fact that people cannot see that distinction and thus end up doing the latter form of abstract pondering is one of the main reasons that they opt for the "more palpable" observation of bodily sensations and similar practices instead.

What one needs to start getting used to is *concrete thinking*, which is the sort of thinking that develops the mind towards Right View and Right Recollection (*sati*). "Concrete" in the sense that one reflects, meditates on, thinks and ponders about the nature of a phenomenon *while* it is present, as opposed to dwelling on

[54] See AN 3.63, walking, standing, lying down during *jhāna*.

an abstract notion of "sensual pleasures are bad", which, sure enough, would not result in anything of real value.

This brings us to another massive shortcoming in the usual approach towards *samādhi,* which is built around trying to get rid of "mind-wandering", as it's called. Truly recognizing the danger in the 5 cords of sensual pleasure *requires* them to present themselves as mental phenomena. That is what allows one to think about their perilous nature *concretely*, and for the contemplation not to revolve around abstract notions that have no practical relevance to when real desires arise. Only then can one start to realize the *gratification* and *danger* in those phenomena while they persist, without which any apparent *escape* will be illusory. When the mind is taken by desire, one should, instead of cowering away by focusing on something else[55], interpret that as a symptom of the mind not having sufficient clarity and confidence regarding the nature of pleasant experiences—which is what is being overlooked whenever one delights in them—and then get to work with *developing* that clarity and address the problem at its root[56]. This clarity/confidence being referred to is precisely what elevates the mind to the level of the first *jhāna*, not a meticulous manipulation of what objects and thoughts arise.

> *Therein, bhikkhus, a noble disciple* ******reflects******* thus: 'Sensual pleasures here and now and sensual pleasures in lives to come, sensual perceptions here and now and sensual perceptions in lives to come—both alike are Māra's realm, Māra's domain, Māra's bait, Māra's hunting ground. On account of them, these evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and aggression arise, and they constitute an obstruction to a noble disciple in training here. Suppose I were to abide with a******* *******mind abundant and exalted, having transcended the world and made a firm determination with the mind. When I do so, there will be no more evil unwholesome mental states such as covetousness, ill will, and aggression in me, and with the abandoning of them my mind will be unlimited, immeasurable, and well developed.' When he practices in this way and frequently abides thus, his mind *****acquires******* *******confidence******* in this base. Once there is full confidence, he either attains to the imperturbable now or else he resolves [upon it] with wisdom. On the dissolution of the body, after death, it is possible that the evolving consciousness may pass on to the imperturbable. This, bhikkhus, is declared to be the first way directed to the imperturbable.*
>
> *—MN 106, Suitable for the Imperturbable*

******Samatha**** is No Exception**

"The Imperturbable" is a term used to refer to the fourth *jhāna* at minimum, which means that this contemplation alone is sufficient to arrive at it eventually, once that full clarity being described is reached. At no point is it said that it's necessary to abandon the aspect of reflective clarity and become absorbed in more rudimentary phenomena instead. Quite the opposite. This Sutta, which contains the most explicit description of how to enter formless attainments further down, proves how even those much more refined states are attained by *reflecting and considering* certain themes until the mind becomes confident in them. What is then to be said of someone whose idea of the very first *jhāna* involves trying to abolish their capacity to reflect on anything? That's quite literally not "meditation" at all.

What the Sutta above is describing is undeniably *samatha* practice, and how it is done through *contemplation/meditation*, not through holding an object in one's mind for a period of time[57] and getting "locked" into

[55] Many approaches acknowledge that forcefully re-focusing the mind is unhelpful, yet ultimately still insist on the fact that the concentration object is helpful to *any* extent. The word *nimitta* in the first strategy of MN 20, sometimes used to justify this view, does not mean "object", but more like "background context" in this case, which is what *meditating upon something* leads to, and **this** dispels unskilful states if the cultivated context is right (and increases them if it's wrong). See SN 12.54.

[56] See Sīla is Samādhi for a detailed example of how one would develop that clarity in regard to the things one has gotten used to not acting out of well beforehand.

[57] If one goes back to square one, and starts reading the Suttas on their own terms having put aside preconceived notions, as the total newcomer described earlier would, one will not find a single instance of the Buddha even mentioning such a thing, not even as a "useful tool". It completely falls outside the scope of *samatha* and the Path as a whole, and the releases and insights it can give rise to are not the right ones that contribute to *permanent and irreversible* freedom. Its results are delicate, guaranteed to fade if you don't practice for not even that long, whereas the changes that the actual *jhānas,* not to mention noble attainments, effect on the mind survive even neurological disorders, amnesia and death itself..

it. *Ānāpānasati, kasiṇas, brahmavihāras, satipaṭṭhānas, jhānas*, formless attainments, cessation of perception-&-feeling—all are developed through concrete reflection that sheds *clarity* onto those phenomena being reflected upon. In the SN 40 series, Ven. Mahāmoggallāna goes through the entire succession of nine meditative attainments by first *clarifying* what they are and what qualities define them. There is no mention of some secondary concentration method that he had to implement, in which case he should've stuck to that and just stayed in the "present moment", instead of allowing these unnecessary concepts and "wandering thoughts" to preoccupy him, which, according to contemporary views generally, would be distractions and obstacles at the time of striving towards *samādhi.*

"Comprehension"/Jhāna vs. Liberative Insight

One will surely wonder, however: what is the difference between the contemplation and clarity that the *jhānas* and *samatha* in general involve, and the discernment of, say, the Four Noble Truths and Three Characteristics?

The straightforward answer is that the reflections that develop *jhāna* are directed at certain classes of phenomena of progressively refined nature, whereas in the noble insight that destroys the fetters, it's the nature of *phenome*na *as such*, in the utmost general sense, that has been brought to light. This is well illustrated in MN 106 quoted above, where one is reflecting on the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of *sensual pleasures specifically*, which is the theme of contemplation that enables one to acquire the fourth *jhāna* and beyond once one is fully skilled in it.

One can certainly attempt to reflect on the nature of phenomena in general, e.g. of the five aggregates, right off the bat, and this would *indirectly* clarify the nature of the phenomena relevant to the *jhānas* , but it can be more beneficial to tackle the "dust in one's eyes" directly, especially sensuality, rather than attempting to see clearly with dusty eyes (SN 35.246). But it's not a hard and fast rule, and both avenues would contribute in their own way to the overall cultivation of the mind and wisdom.

Furthermore, as MN 64 and several others explain, once the comprehension of these specific phenomena that gives rise to *jhāna* is brought to fulfillment and the mind is perfectly pliable and free from obstructions, one then goes on to meditate on the nature of that entirely wholesome experience, and this necessarily brings to light the nature of *all* phenomena, to the extent necessary for fetters to be destroyed, which are not necessarily addressed by the initial meditation upon the danger of sensuality, etc.[58] As the Sutta explains, this would lead to the destruction of the five lower fetters, not only to stream-entry, which one cannot "stay" at if skilled in *jhānas*.

Thus, right reflection is at the core of both *samatha* and *vipassanā*. *Samatha* simply involves a specialized form of contemplation aimed at the things that defile the mind, clearing the obstacles for *vipassanā* to take root. However, if one doesn't know how and what things must be discerned, one will fail to contemplate properly so that the mind gets purified to begin with.

> *There is no jhāna without discernment, no discernment without jhāna.*
>
> *One who has jhāna and discernment—they're in the presence of Nibbāna.*
>
> *—Dhammapada 372*[59]

******Jhāna**** Needed for Stream-Entry?**

What's been said so far will also serve to shed some light on a familiar controversy among modern Buddhists, which is whether *jhāna* is necessary for the attainment of stream-entry, given that a *sotāpanna* is said to possess *sammāsamādhi*, which is defined as the four *jhānas*. The solution to the seeming conundrum is that

[58] This does not mean that one can be "attached to *jhāna*" as is often believed. As MN 64 says, the very first *jhāna* is reached through "withdrawal from appropriation" (*upadhiviveka)*, which is why it's impossible for *jhānas* to be responsible for any unwholesome states. It's simply that if one doesn't take that same practice further, which requires instruction on *anattā* from a Buddha or a disciple, one will only be free from sensuality but not from self-view/conceit, i.e. still a *puthujjana.* Contemporary "*jhāna"*, however, does not even result in freedom from the former, as many would acknowledge if they're self-honest.

[59] Obviously, either of these two mutually reinforcing qualities can be somewhat ahead of the other depending on the person's tendencies, but that's not how it's usually taken, i.e., as two completely different things, to the point of requiring different techniques and *modus operandi*.

a stream-enterer, due to having first and foremost seen the danger in sensuality (see AN 6.73 above & MN 14) on account of seeing the origin of *dukkha*, and furthermore due to being able to recognize the hints of their mind *(cittassa nimitta)*, which is the basis for any mind-development as per SN 47.8, has the *faculty* to meditate on the nature of sensuality correctly, in its full extent, and no longer confuses playing around with ideas and right reflection. Such a person has developed the *concrete thinking* described earlier, which is essentially the enlightenment factor of *dhammavicaya*[60]. Hence, when they reflect on the nature of sensuality and unwholesome states, or on the fundamental truths they understood, they are practicing *jhāna,* even if they're still not aware of it and have not obtained the wholesome pleasure of detachment from sensuality yet, which can take a while (AN 3.94, MN 14). This cannot be said for the *puthujjana*, who still does not see what the defilements are, let alone the way out of them. Thus, it is because of their Right View that they have Right Effort and Right Recollection, and whenever those two are present, the possibility of *jhāna* also is, though one may not have brought it to realization yet.

> *"Lady, what is composure (samādhi)? What is the basis of composure? What is the equipment of composure? What is the development of composure?"*
>
> *"Unification of mind (citta-ekaggatā)*[61]*, friend Visākha, is composure; the four foundations of mindfulness*[62] *are the basis of composure; the four right kinds of striving are the equipment of composure; the repetition, development, and cultivation of these same states is the development of composure therein.*
>
> *—MN 44*
>
> *Bhikkhus, if, even for a fingersnap, a bhikkhu cultivates Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollectedness and Right Composure, I say that he is called a bhikkhu who is* ******not devoid of jhāna*******, who follows the Teacher's instructions, who responds to advice, and who does not eat the country's alms in vain. How much more so those who make much of it!"*
>
> *—AN 1.431-438 (SuttaCentral numbering)*

"But… What About The Cessation of ****** **Vitakka-Vicāra**** **?"**

Now, one may object that this concept of *samatha* in general being all about contemplation of the correct themes is incompatible with the fact that there is no thinking-and-pondering present from the second *jhāna* onwards. The answer to that is that one's conception of right contemplation is not accurate unless one is already able to enter the first *jhāna* (which is highly unlikely to happen before stream-entry today if it is to be the real deal)[63] and thus one will not be able to conceive of how the aspect of reflection and consideration of phenomena is present, in increasing levels of refinement, all the way up to the cessation of perception and feeling. If one has not learned to take the hint of one's mind (*cittassa nimitta),* it is impossible for one to understand what right contemplation is, and how it can be done without the coarse philosophizing and theorizing which is all that one knows as "contemplation".

Nevertheless, suffice it to say that when you choose to go against the grain of your desires to keep the precepts and be sense-restrained—being clear about their true purpose as well, not just mechanically—there is a nascent form of that contemplation whether you recognize it at the time or not, although you may not

[60] See SN 46.30 on how all the seven *bojjhaṅgas* are acquired *with* stream-entry, not before, as tends to be conveniently believed.

[61] This term *ekaggatā* has often been translated in an extremely misleading manner as "one-pointedness". The truth is that the word *agga* in Pali does not mean "point" *anywhere* in the early texts, and the notion gets extraneously inserted to accommodate modern views. *Agga* rather means "tip, top, peak" and even "room, place". In the first *jhāna, ekaggatā* refers to the "one room" or "one peak" that the mind abides in, the "one apex" of one's experience, which is the way of regarding sense pleasures described in MN 106 above. The overarching theme or "peak" for the ordinary person is the opposite: welcoming sensuality.

[62] See my previous essay on the four *satipaṭṭhānas*—the four frameworks of right contemplation.

[63] MN 14 shows how the layman Mahānāma, who is acknowledged to be a Noble Disciple by the Buddha, is still not able to attain *jhānas*. If it were as easy as it's thought of these days, to the point where many ordinary people can get anywhere close to it in the span of a 10-day retreat, it would make no sense for someone who is already so far ahead in their practice—an *enlightened being,* no less, who possesses the seven enlightenment factors—to not be able to enter *jhāna.* Same goes for Ven. Mahāmoggallāna, who initially struggled with his *samādhi* in AN 7.61 and throughout SN 40, and for every lay stream-enterer who was not celibate, which, as MN 14 proves, would be impossible if they had been proficient in at least the first *jhāna.* Non-celibacy for such a person is just as far-fetched as willingly stepping back into a charcoal pit, as the simile goes, having already recognized it for what it is and finally experienced the relief of getting away from it.

be actively philosophizing about how "sensuality is bad" every time you restrain yourself from acting out of it.[64]

> *"But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil true knowledge and liberation?" "The seven factors of enlightenment, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil true knowledge and liberation.""But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment?" "The four establishments of recollection, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment." "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the four establishments of recollection?" "*******The three kinds of good conduct, Ku********ṇḍ********aliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the four establishments of recollection."***** "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfil the three kinds of good conduct?"* "******Restraint of the sense faculties, Ku********ṇḍ********aliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfils the three kinds of good conduct.******
>
> *"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, is restraint of the sense faculties developed and cultivated so that it fulfils the three kinds of good conduct? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having seen an agreeable form with the eye, a bhikkhu does not long for it, or become excited by it, or generate lust for it. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated. But having seen a disagreeable form with the eye, he is not dismayed by it, not daunted, not dejected, without ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated.*
>
> *"Further, Kuṇḍaliya, having heard an agreeable sound with the ear … having smelt an agreeable odour with the nose … having savoured an agreeable taste with the tongue … having felt an agreeable tactile object with the body … having cognized an agreeable mental phenomenon with the mind, a bhikkhu does not long for it, or become excited by it, or generate lust for it. But having cognized a disagreeable mental phenomenon with the mind, he is not dismayed by it, not daunted, not dejected, without ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated.*
>
> *"When, Kuṇḍaliya, after he has seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu's body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated in regard to both agreeable and disagreeable forms; when, after he has heard a sound with the ear … smelt an odour with the nose … savoured a taste with the tongue … felt a tactile object with the body … cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, a bhikkhu's body is steady and his mind is steady, inwardly well composed and well liberated in regard to both agreeable and disagreeable mental phenomena, then his restraint of the sense faculties has been developed and cultivated in such a way that it fulfils the three kinds of good conduct.*
>
> *"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the three kinds of good conduct developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the four establishments of recollection? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having abandoned bodily misconduct, a bhikkhu develops good bodily conduct; having abandoned verbal misconduct, he develops good verbal conduct; having abandoned mental misconduct, he develops good mental conduct. It is in this way that the three kinds of good conduct are developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the four establishments of recollection.*
>
> *"And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the four establishments of recollection developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. He dwells contemplating feelings in feelings … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. It is in this way that the four establishments of recollection are developed and cultivated so that they fulfil the seven factors of enlightenment.*
>
> *—SN 46.6, Kuṇḍaliya*

******Jhāna**** First, Renunciation Later?**

[64] Refer to **Sīla is Samādhi** for more on how unwavering commitment to virtue and restraint already involves comprehension of the right things in its foundational degree. This contains a list of Dhamma talks on the topic of *cittassa nimitta*, which is what enables "concrete thinking", and also is the necessary factor for virtue to go beyond a mere habit.

MN 14, which has already been referred to above, contains a passage that has led to mistaken conclusions regarding the proper order of the practice of *jhāna:*

> *"Then Mahānāma the Sakyan went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and said:"Venerable sir, I have long understood the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One thus: 'Greed is an imperfection that defiles the mind, hate is an imperfection that defiles the mind, delusion is an imperfection that defiles the mind.' Yet while I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One thus, at times states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain. I have wondered, venerable sir, what state is still unabandoned by me internally, owing to which at times these states of greed, hate, and delusion invade my mind and remain.*
>
> *"Mahānāma, there is still a state unabandoned by you internally, owing to which at times states of greed, hate, and delusion invade your mind and remain; for were that state already abandoned by you internally you would not be living the home life, you would not be enjoying sensual pleasures. It is because that state is unabandoned by you internally that you are living the home life and enjoying sensual pleasures.*
>
> *Even though a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and despair, and that the danger in them is still more, as long as he still does not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, he may still be attracted to sensual pleasures. But when a noble disciple has seen clearly as it actually is with proper wisdom that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering and despair, and that the danger in them is still more, and he attains to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, then he is no longer attracted to sensual pleasures.*
>
> *"Before my enlightenment, while I was still only an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too clearly saw as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, but as long as I still did not attain to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognised that I still could be attracted to sensual pleasures. But when I clearly saw as it actually is with proper wisdom how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them, and I attained to the rapture and pleasure that are apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, or to something more peaceful than that, I recognised that I was no longer attracted to sensual pleasures."*
>
> *—MN 14. Shorter Discourse on the Great Mass of Suffering*

This is taken by some to mean that one will only be able to achieve full restraint from sensuality *after* attaining *jhānas*, conflating "being still attracted to sensual pleasures" , which the Buddha says he initially also was, with a justification for *actions* rooted in that attraction, failing to see that the attraction is fueled further primarily *by* the actions, not some ambiguous energies that concentration practices help dissipate.

Doubtlessly, there is a lot of appeal in the idea that adherence to some "meditation" method is by itself purifying the mind from sense desire, and that this process happens in a vacuum, more or less irrespective of the actions one does "off the cushion". That, at some point down the line, one's mind will naturally not be interested in sensual pleasures anymore, so until one's skill in these "*jhānas"* matures sufficiently, one is justified in giving in to desires so as to not make the practice too difficult.

This very palatable idea disastrously gets things the wrong way round, and overlooks the true reason for the five hindrances and the lack of proper context of the nature of sensuality—the six obstacles to attaining the pleasure of dispassion as mentioned in AN 6.73 quoted earlier—ensuring that whatever comes out of one's efforts will not be true *jhāna.*

> *"I say, bhikkhus, that ignorance has a nutriment; it is not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for ignorance? It should be said: the five hindrances. The five hindrances, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the five hindrances? It should be said: the three kinds of misconduct. The three kinds of misconduct, too, I say, have a nutriment; they are not without nutriment. And what is the nutriment for the three kinds of misconduct? It should be said:*

******non-restraint of the sense faculties.******

—AN 10.61, Ignorance

In addition, the chinese *Āgama* parallel to MN 14 has a more explicit take on the matter than the Pāli version:

> *At that time Mahānāma the Sakyan, while walking about after midday, approached the Buddha. Having paid homage with his head at the Buddha's feet, stepped back, and sat to one side, he said:*
>
> *World-honored One, as I understand the teaching of the World-honored One, I must bring about the cessation of the three defilements in my mind: the defilement of mind by greed, the defilement of mind by hatred, and the defilement of mind by delusion. World-honored One, [although] I understand the teaching like this, yet states of greed, states of hatred, and states of delusion still arise in my mind. World-honored One, I am thinking: What condition have I not eradicated that still causes states of greed, states of hatred, and states of delusion*
>
> *to arise in my mind?*
>
> *The World-honored One said:*
>
> *Mahānāma, [within] you there is one condition that has not been eradicated, namely [that because of which] you remain a householder, instead of leaving the household life out of faith and becoming a homeless one to practice the path. Mahānāma, if you had eradicated this one condition, you would certainly not remain a householder but would certainly leave the household life out of faith and become a homeless one to practice the path. It is because this one condition has not been eradicated that you have remained a householder instead of leaving the household life out of faith and becoming a homeless one to practice the path. […]*
>
> *Mahānāma, it should be understood that there is no happiness at all in sensual pleasures; [there is only] immeasurable suffering and misery.* ******If a learned noble disciple does not see this as it really is, then he is enveloped by sensual pleasures and will not attain the happiness of relinquishment and unsurpassable peace.******
>
> *Mahānāma, in this way a learned noble disciple* ******regresses******* because of sensual pleasures. Mahānāma, I know that there is no happiness in sensual pleasures, but only immeasurable misery. Knowing this as it really is, Mahānāma, I am not enveloped by sensual pleasures and not overcome by what is unbeneficial, and so I attain the happiness of relinquishment and unsurpassable peace. Mahānāma, for this reason I do not regress because of sensual pleasures.*
>
> —Madhyama Āgama 100, The Second Discourse on the Mass of Suffering

******Do As You Think, Think As You Do**********

Given that the *jhānas* are achieved primarily through reflections such as the one of regarding sensual pleasures as undesirable, the fact that meditation (again, in the original meaning of that word) and thus *samādhi* is incompatible with sensual behavior becomes a no-brainer. You can't be (in good faith) reflecting on how sensual pleasures are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and constitute an obstacle when your day-to-day actions are still outlets for sensual desire, and prove your underlying view of it as satisfactory and beneficial.

Reflecting honestly, you would realize that the first step in truly meditating on that theme, which is the basis for the first *jhāna* as a whole host of Suttas point out (DN 2, MN 19, MN 20, MN 39, MN 75, MN 106, SN 35.244, SN 35.246… to name just a few), is to *actually* stop stepping on the "traps" of the five cords of sensuality intentionally. Not doing so and then trying to develop this meditation would be not only hypocritical but also futile, since by delighting in sense pleasure, one is falling away from the wholesome states the Buddha taught, and even more so as a *puthujjana,* who intrinsically does not see wholesome as wholesome clearly. Regardless of one's views and wishes, the polar opposite of the meditation praised by the Buddha is being cultivated*:*

> *"Bhikkhus, I will teach you about one who is subject to decline, about one who is not subject to decline, and about the six mastered bases. Listen to that….*

> "*And how, bhikkhus, is one subject to decline? Here, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has seen a form with the eye, there arise in him evil unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the fetters. If the bhikkhu tolerates them and does not abandon them, dispel them, put an end to them, and obliterate them,****** he should understand this thus: 'I am declining away from wholesome states. For this has been called decline by the Blessed One.'************

> "*Further, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has heard a sound with the ear … cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, there arise in him evil unwholesome states, memories and intentions connected with the fetters. If the bhikkhu tolerates them and does not abandon them, dispel them, put an end to them, and obliterate them, he should understand this thus: 'I am declining away from wholesome states. For this has been called decline by the Blessed One.'*

> "*It is in such a way, bhikkhus, that one is subject to decline.*

> *—SN 35.96, Decline*

Two Mutually Exclusive "Abidings"

Once a person begins to abide peacefully in the right meditation that is utterly purified of sensual desire, it will begin to sink in that they have always been a "meditator" all along, whether they realized it or not. The lustful, averse, lethargic, restless and doubtful mind is also an *abiding* that results from one's "meditation" upon the theme of sensual pleasures, ill-will and distractions as valuable and worthwhile, and one's unrestrained bodily and verbal actions are just the outpours of that theme of meditation. Fostering that theme makes one increasingly abide "quite assailed with sensuality, quite infected with unwholesome states, with fantasizing-and-longing, in the pain and suffering born of attachment"—state which the whole world mistakenly regards as joyous and exciting when external things *happen* to go well.

Trying to remedy this situation by concentrating upon an object, successfully as one may, is shortsighted and of no real use, because it's still happening within the "meditation" that the ignorant mind has always been doing under the hood, no matter how many overwhelmingly pleasant and seemingly spiritually relevant experiences it may provide (only *sometimes*, to boot), and how well it temporarily distracts you from the coarser pleasures that you would *otherwise* be craving for, as usual.

The Nature of Ignorance

by *Bhikkhu Anīgha*

In order to fix any problem, one needs to have an accurate idea of what that problem is. With the ultimate issue that is *avijjā*, this is even more the case, as a wrong view about what ignorance is will necessarily mean striving towards an insight, and even liberation, of the wrong kind—namely, pertaining to something that is not actually the root of one's suffering.

Contemporarily, the view that practitioners hold for the most part is that ignorance is a lack of access to some great secret or "ultimate reality" underlying their experience. As a result of this, the sort of "insight" being aimed at is on the level of a special *perception* or revelatory *experience*, a common example being the idea of a hidden "flux" or "stream" of changing phenomena which—once a subtle bit of reasoning and information has been applied, meaning it's not a direct insight—"means" that experience is *anattā*[65] .

The knowledge that a *puthujjana* is truly missing out on is something comparatively unexciting and less superficially grandiose than the insights practitioners tend to anticipate and glorify, but immeasurably more fundamental and indispensable for any development of mind to take place. So fundamental, in fact, that

[65]There are multiple faults with this right off the bat. The first implication this naturally carries is that *anattā* means "*no-self*", as opposed to *"not-self"*. By perceiving the unceasing flux of experience, one *concludes* that there is therefore no lasting entity that can be called a"self", failing to see that that's not even what the fetter of self-view is about in the first place. Thus, having a wrong view about what ignorance is would in this case lead to an insight of the wrong kind, as said previously. As per the *Anattālakkhana Sutta*, *anattā* is the lack of control over the aggregates and their nature of not leading to one's well-being in themselves. It has nothing to do with there being no discernible identity that endures over time, and that´s why the insight of *anattā* is always described in terms of "this is not mine", as the actual issue is *appropriation*, not whether or how long anything lasts across time. There *is* an enduring entity, and the issue of ignorance is in the false sense of control and ownership over that entity.

the lack of said recognition ensures and maintains itself, meaning that there is no way for the right type of insight to arise "by accident" or "naturally", unlike special visions and meditative experiences that can happen even on account of drugs. The truly supramundane "vision" the ordinary person lacks pertains simply to their own intentions, to knowing them when and for what they are.

> *"Bhante, they speak of 'an astute person with great understanding'. How is an astute person with great understanding defined?"*
>
> *"Good, good, bhikkhu! Your approach and articulation are excellent, and it's a good question. … An astute person with great understanding is one who does not intend in a way that leads to their own harm, to the harm of others, or to the harm of both. When they think, they only think in a way that is beneficial for themselves, for others, for both, and for the whole world. That's how a person is astute, with great understanding."*
>
> *—AN 4.186*

The *puthujjana*, defined as the person who lacks understanding, is unable to ensure their internal welfare because they themselves inadvertently intend in ways that jeopardize it, and there are only two possible reasons behind this: 1) they have not even a concept of what their true welfare is, meaning they've never come across the Dhamma, understood it intellectually and acknowledged it as true, or 2) they are unable to see unbeneficial intentions *as they are taking place* in their own mind, even if they're well-learned and fully devoted to the teachings.

It is because of this that it is said…

> *"There are two conditions for the arising of right view: the words of another and attention through the source (*******yoniso manasikāra*******)."*
>
> *—MN 43*

We need to look no further than the first fetter for the best example of not seeing unbeneficial intentions as they take place. The person without the Right View regards their experiences as "me" and "mine" not because they *want to*, especially not if they agree with the Buddha's core teachings, as almost everyone reading this probably does. It's because one doesn't even notice that attitude taking place in the first place that it continues to take place, and that attitude, that "regarding", is nothing but an *activity/intention* (*saṅkhāra)*, meaning that the *puthujjana* is responsible for it.

> *And how, bhikkhus, does one know and see in order to immediately end the defilements with no in-between? Take an untrained ordinary person who has not seen the noble ones, and is neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the noble ones. They've not seen true persons, and are neither skilled nor trained in the teaching of the true persons.*
>
> *They regard form as self. But that regarding is just an activity (saṅkhāra). And what's the source, origin, birthplace, and inception of that activity? For an unlearned ordinary person who is struck by feelings born of ignorance-pressure, craving arises. That activity is born from that. So that activity is impermanent, conditioned, and dependently originated. And that craving, that feeling, that pressure, and that ignorance are also impermanent, conditioned, and dependently originated. That's how one should know and see in order to end the defilements with no in-between.*
>
> *[they regard feeling, perception, activities, consciousness as self…]*
>
> *—SN 22.81*

The same applies to the other two fetters that a *sotāpanna* has abandoned as well. It's not that one knowingly *chooses* to hold on to virtue and duty (which is the implication when *sīlabbataparāmāsa* is translated as "clinging to rites and rituals"*)*, or to be uncertain about the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha (the fetter of doubt), and therefore it's not about simply doing the opposite either. It's rather that those intentions are taking place without one's knowledge, and once they are known, they can never come back, as one can't

wish for one's own harm knowingly[66], especially when the result of it is a mountain of suffering (SN 56.49).

This is why it's also not only wrong but disastrous to think that a *puthujjana* can momentarily be free from ignorance and craving ("stop the chain" of *paṭiccasamuppāda)* if they just apply a meditation method or attend things like this or that, stop thinking, etc. The true nature of ignorance is such that it occurs due to having no idea that it's occurring, which means that if it is truly seen even once, it cannot come back to the same extent it was present before. Such a view thus implies not only an ignorance of what ignorance is, which is exactly what it needs to continue unhindered, but also a conviction that one is already abandoning it when one clearly isn't, doubling the magnitude of the problem.

And these fetters are not the only instances where harmful intentions go unnoticed. At any given time, there will be intentions and inclinations of passion, aversion, and distraction that the ordinary person cannot see themselves having. This is what the Simile of the Cook Sutta (SN 47.8) refers to with "not grasping the hints of the mind (*cittassa nimitta*)", and saying that without that ability, it's impossible to abandon defilements. MN 2 also states that the destruction of defilements happens only for one who understands **yoniso manasikāra**, which in this relevant case would be the ability to see the "source" of whatever one is attending in the form of the *intention* behind that attention, which is where the defilements are to be found, not in *what* one is attending.

For instance, one might be fervently contemplating the Dhamma, which is a superficially wholesome action, but not realizing that in the background, on the level of that "source" (yoni), there is presently an intention of restlessness or of aversion towards an arisen feeling, which one is resisting and hoping to get rid of through that contemplation. Alternatively, people's efforts towards practice can often be rooted in a superficial sense of inspiration that is just a way of riding the wave of a pleasant feeling, and they wouldn't realize that their practice should be directed towards questioning that peripheral intention instead of just going along with whatever the mind is pulling towards, even if it's ideas about the Dhamma. This is what SN 47.8 means with the example of the monk who is practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* diligently, ardently and resolutely, and yet is unable to achieve the results that matter, like the cook who is not able to accurately pick up on the preferences of the king (the peripheral leanings of the mind) and serve him the food that he actually wants at the right time.[67]

Those results that matter, as the Sutta also says, include the *jhānas*. That's because the five hindrances can only be overcome by the one who knows and sees them, and they are the epitome of "underlying intentions" that the undeveloped mind overlooks. That's why the person who truly can abandon the five hindrances has next to nothing stopping them from getting the Right View, as they have already necessarily learned the principle of *yoniso* and *ayoniso manasikāra* described in MN 2. They wouldn't be able to overcome those states unless they were already able to see themselves bringing them about and proliferating them, and that happens on the level of those peripheral intentions and *ayoniso manasikāra*. No mechanical meditation method can possibly absolve one from having to know and see those obstructions on the right level first in order to transcend them, as their nature is to indiscriminately underlie whatever one does[68], even the practice of Dhamma, all the more when it's of the mechanical kind that is common today.

Lastly, it cannot be emphasized enough that it's not just a matter of knowing what beneficial and unbeneficial intentions are on the intellectual level, or of classifying everything according to some predetermined scheme. Rather, uncovering one's underlying motivations and thus defilements is a process that unfolds over the long term, and its proximate cause is the abstinence from the unskillful intentions that one is already aware of, no matter how superficial one's threshold of recognition may be initially. This is what is accomplished by the stages of Gradual Training that are the prerequisites for success in the purification of the mind from hindrances. Refraining from proliferating arisen unwholesome mental states and pressures through actions is the only thing that can eventually make those previously overlooked mental states apparent for what they are. Conversely, acting out of them is the supreme way to continue to overlook them, as that necessarily

[66] One can intentionally harm oneself in various ways, but even that is always done with the expectation of either more pleasure or less pain on the fundamental level.

[67] All this can be summarized by saying that one cannot intend what one actually wants to intend—what you say to yourself that you're intending—meaning non-passion, non-aversion, and non-distraction. One intends the opposite instead on the peripheral level, not even seeing oneself doing so, and feeling sure of having the right motivation all along.

[68] Hence, they're compared to parasitic trees that encircle and grow around other trees in SN 46.39.

involves directing one's attention past where they are, and toward this or that object or perception instead—the primordial state of the undeveloped mind.

Once ignorance pertaining to the recognition of the defilements has been abandoned, the Four Noble Truths are not far from one's grasp, because one will then be able to discern craving where it really is. Exactly how it is the root of suffering and that which turns all of one's intentions and efforts against oneself would by that point be clear as day.

> *"Through the round of many births,*
>
> *I transmigrated without success,*
>
> *searching for the builder of the house.*
>
> *Painful is birth again and again!*
>
> *House-builder, you've been seen!*
>
> *You will not build a house again,*
>
> *for your rafters and broken*
>
> *and your ridgepole shattered.*
>
> *The mind, arrived at* ******non-activity****** *(visaṅkhāragata),*
>
> *has come to the destruction of craving."*
>
> *—Dhammapada 153-154*

Pervading the world with friendliness

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

> *Q: "I saw a video of Ajahn Nyanamoli talking about how the common practice of 'spreading and sending' metta- is basically useless, because, if I understood correctly, if your heart is truly full of metta you don't have to spread it around, it's instead just a friendly disposition toward all beings and phenomena. He also said that the common practice of spreading metta is often used as a"coverup" and as an escape from difficult emotions- avoiding the task at hand- and that all sounds very sensible to me.*
>
> *But why do some suttas talk in this manner?*
>
> *'And what is the measureless liberation of mind? It's when a bhikkhu dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with friendliness the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind imbued with friendliness—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion. He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with compassion … He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with contentment … He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with equanimity the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind imbued with equanimity—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion.' "*

Firstly, it must be noted that *mettā* is not and does not involve "love". "Love" is not "*mettā*" but"*pema*", and this needs to be "abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, obliterated, and unable to arise in the future."[69]

Sorrow springs from love (pema),

fear springs from love;

one free from love

[69] AN 4.200. See also the essay "**There's no love in loving-kindness**".

has no sorrow, let alone fear.

—Dhammapada 213

"Loving-kindness" would therefore also be a misleading rendering of "mettā". *Mittā* (as in *kalyāṇamittā*) means "friend", and this is where the term mettā derives from. Even if "love" is taken in a more refined sense, as some sort of "spiritual love", it would still be at odds with dispassion and constitute an obstruction to total relinquishment, while genuine mettā is one of the unconditionally favorable qualities that an Arahant, who is free from any trace of liking and affinity, has *perfected*, not *given up*.[70]

Mettā is also not something that can be volitionally produced. The "liberation of mind through friendliness" (*mettācetovimutti)* described in the Suttas is the *consequence* of the successful purification of the mind from ill will.[71] Just as abandoning the five hindrances is what naturally results in the first jhāna, so too abandoning all possibility for ill will and associated mental states leads on its own to a mind of friendliness, which can then be further refined.

> *"How, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu practice the way proper to the renunciate? When any bhikkhu who was covetous has abandoned covetousness, who had a mind of ill will has abandoned ill will, who was angry has abandoned anger, who was resentful has abandoned resentment, who was contemptuous has abandoned contempt, who was insolent has abandoned insolence, who was envious has abandoned envy, who was avaricious has abandoned avarice, who was fraudulent has abandoned fraud, who was deceitful has abandoned deceit, who had harmful wishes has abandoned harmful wishes, who had wrong view has abandoned wrong view, then he practices the way proper to the renunciate, I say, because of his abandoning these stains of the renunciate, these faults of the renunciate, these dregs of the renunciate, which are grounds for rebirth in a state of deprivation and whose results are to be experienced in an unhappy destination.*
>
> *"He sees himself purified of all these harmful, unfavorable things; he sees himself liberated from them. When he sees this, gladness is born in him. When he is glad, joy is born in him; in one who is joyous, the body becomes calm; one whose body is calm feels at ease; in one who feels at ease, the mind becomes composed.*
>
> *"He dwells having pervaded with a mind imbued with friendliness the first direction, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth. In the same way above, below, across, everywhere, he dwells having pervaded the whole world with a mind of friendliness—abundant, expansive, measureless, free of enmity and aversion.*
>
> *(and so on for compassion, contentment, and equanimity).*
>
> *—MN 40*
>
> *I have heard this, Bhante: 'Brahmā abides in friendliness'. Regarding that, the Blessed One I see with my own eyes. The Blessed One abides in friendliness."*
>
> *"Jīvaka, any passion, any aversion, or any delusion whereby ill will might arise in him, the Tathāgata has abandoned, cut off at the roots, made like a palm-stump, done away with so that it is no longer liable to future arising. If what you said referred to that, then I allow it you."*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *I have heard this, Bhante: 'Brahmā abides in equanimity'. Regarding that, the Blessed One I see with my own eyes. The Blessed One abides in equanimity."*
>
> *"Jīvaka, any passion, any aversion, or any delusion* ******whereby annoyance, discontent, or resistance******[72] *might arise in him, the Tathāgata has abandoned, cut off at the roots, made like a palm-stump,*

[70] As shown by the Buddha's own example, this is not something that would be necessarily observable outwardly, as his manner in the Suttas is never less than stern, and is sometimes outright brusque. In MN 81, Ven. Ānanda, his attendant, is even surprised at seeing him smile. This does not justify all-out rudeness and harsh speech; it simply means that external displays of amiability are not the measure of mettā, and can very well originate from a place of insecurity rather than the legitimate absence of any possibility of ill will.

[71] "**Longer Discussion on Four Brahmavihāras**"

[72] It is implied here that to develop the further *brahmavihāras,* it's the underlying liability to passion, aversion, and delusion that needs

done away with so that it is no longer liable to future arising. If what you said referred to that, then I allow it you."

—MN 55

What forcing and fabricating mettā or any of the other divine abidings will always entail is concealing—successfully as one may—the problem's symptoms instead of addressing its root.

The Buddha therefore instructs that one should practice mettā only *after* the mind is already not overcome by ill will. The mind first needs to be able to remain steady all by itself when encountering things that challenge it, instead of needing to use mettā or any other form of meditation as an aid to ameliorate such things.

"Venerable sir, may the Buddha please teach me Dhamma in brief! May the Holy One teach me the Dhamma in brief! Hopefully I can understand the meaning of what the Buddha says! Hopefully I can be an heir of the Buddha's teaching!"

"Well then, bhikkhu, you should train like this: 'My mind will be steady and well settled internally. And harmful, unfavorable qualities that have arisen will not overtake my mind.' That's how you should train.

When your mind is steady and well settled internally, and harmful, unfavorable qualities that have arisen don't overtake your mind, then you should train like this: 'I will develop the liberation of mind through friendliness. I'll cultivate it, make it my vehicle and my basis, keep it up, consolidate it, and properly implement it.' That's how you should train.

—AN 8.63

"Bhikkhus, possessing five qualities, a bhikkhu is incapable of entering and dwelling in right composure. What five? Here, a bhikkhu cannot patiently endure forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and touches. Possessing these five qualities, a bhikkhu is incapable of entering and dwelling in right composure.

—AN 5.113

Once this indispensable foundation of mental stability is achieved[73], you would be able to start recognizing how and to what extent ill will is actually a gratuitous layer the mind adds on top of displeasing feelings, and how this layer can eventually be peeled off through further restraint, discernment, and diligence.

The root of hatred is never something external like what someone did to you or who they are, nor even how those things make you feel. All of that simply acts as a trigger for the already-latent tendency to aversion, and that is what one should be addressing. Feelings are not in one's ultimate control.

"Bhikkhus, just as heat is generated and fire is produced from the conjunction and friction of two fire-sticks, but with the separation and laying aside of the sticks the resultant heat ceases and subsides; so too, in dependence on a contact to be experienced as pleasant…a contact to be experienced as unpleasant…a contact to be experienced as neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling arises…. With the cessation of that contact to be experienced as neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, the corresponding feeling … ceases and subsides.

—SN 12.62

"Bhikkhus, feeling is nonself. For if, bhikkhus, feeling were self, feeling would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.' But because feeling is nonself, feeling leads to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of feeling: 'Let my feeling be thus; let my feeling not be thus.'

—SN 22.59

to be abandoned even further, so that—having already done away with ill-will and achieved *mettā* as a result—annoyance, discontent, and finally resistance are overcome, automatically giving way to compassion, contentment, and equanimity respectively.

[73] By undertaking the precepts and the restraint of unwholesome intentions. Since sensuality and ill will go hand in hand, any actions rooted in the former will inevitably make one susceptible to the latter. Any peace meditation can bring despite those actions still being performed would stem from covering up that susceptibility.

So instead of trying to scramble for ways to suppress the disagreeability caused by people or events and replace it with the opposite[74], which may not work at all if the circumstance is particularly challenging, what you need to do is cease to provide the fuel[75] for ill will—the *aversion* towards the disagreeability—to remain and further increase, and leave the disagreeability itself alone. This is how you would slowly but surely wear away the core of the problem and any future liability to it.

> "*And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen ill will and for the increase and expansion of arisen ill will? There is, bhikkhus*******, the sign of opposition******* (paṭighanimitta): frequently attending to it not through the origin (ayoniso manasikāra) is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen ill will and for the increase and expansion of arisen ill will.*
>
> *—SN 46.51*[76]

Since both ill will and the internal basis for it are there simultaneously, they are indistinguishable for the ignorant mind that is used to turning pressure into unwholesome states and cannot conceive how to stay calm *despite* that which tries to provoke it. The natural and effortless course of action is then to try to eliminate the provocation, just now inwardly instead of by lashing out at external entities as it used to. Hence, suppression and management of challenging emotions is precisely the approach that most people will find congenial and "helpful"—it stems from the same tendency to shun unpleasant feelings, and the Middle Way remains untrodden.

A person who deals with their ill will like this is the same as someone who can only tolerate vegetables when they're smeared with a thick dressing that masks their actual taste. To put it bluntly, it's a form of cheating.

In the ultimate sense, the mind can only really be averse towards itself[77]: you can't truly hate somebody else directly; you can only hate (or love, for that matter) *how they make you feel*. Consequently, managing your feelings is at best quantitatively and not qualitatively different from crudely hateful behaviors aimed at other people.

Proper abandonment of ill will requires you to endure discomfort internally[78], and does not provide the immediate, easy escape from it that most people expect. It forces you to withstand the tug of your own mind attempting to sprint in the direction that it's been habituated to. But by sticking to that patiently, you would over time begin to see for yourself that none of the disagreeability and dissonance that was felt when someone insulted you, attacked you, annoyed you, or was simply not pleasant to be with, and which you would've instinctively covered up by trying to "antidote" it with loving-kindness, was in any way the problem. It was an entirely separate movement in the direction of ill will, of *leaning away* from displeasure, that was responsible for all the suffering, and that would've been subdued in the right way such that it simply cannot return even if you wanted it to, much less if circumstances merely get out of hand.

> "*And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? Here, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu is not intent upon a pleasing form and not repelled by a displeasing form. He dwells having set up recollection of the body*******, with a measureless mind,******* and he understands as it is that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those harmful unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having heard a sound with the ear … Having cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, he is not intent upon a pleasing mental phenomenon and not repelled by a displeasing mental phenomenon. He dwells having set up recollection of the body, with a measureless mind, and he understands as it is that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those harmful unwholesome states cease without remainder. It is in such a way that there is restraint.*

[74] By trying to convince yourself that the other is ultimately a good person, that they harmed you unintentionally, that they will one day change their ways, by repeating to yourself that you forgive them, etc. All of this simply continues to project the problem externally, ironically making you still liable to ill will. The practice is not about simply "reconditioning" the way you feel about this or that person or object, in which case the Dhamma would be little more than psychotherapy. The Dhamma is about uprooting the underlying tendencies to passion, aversion, and ignorance in regard to what you feel.

[75] That "fuel" is always in the form of *actions*, including mental ones such as relishing the thought of retaliating against someone, or in general of doing things to relieve the displeasure.

[76] i.e., the *paṭighanimitta* is *not* ill will in and of itself.

[77] "**Mind Self-Inflicting**"

[78] Which, of course, is not the same as tolerating unwholesome thoughts.

"Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals—with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, 'Let me enter an anthill' … as above … The monkey would pull another way, thinking, 'Let me enter a forest.'

"Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated recollection related to the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable forms nor are disagreeable forms aversive; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds aversive; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odours nor are disagreeable odours aversive; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes aversive; the body does not pull in the direction of agreeable touches nor are disagreeable touches aversive; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable phenomena nor are disagreeable phenomena aversive.

—SN 35.247

"Boundlessness" can only be achieved if you learn how to not get bound by things that try to bind you. Otherwise, you will be bound by the task of controlling circumstances, which includes the very way your aggregates are shaped by events.

"This is called, friends, a bhikkhu who is uncorrupted amidst forms cognizable by the eye, uncorrupted amidst sounds cognizable by the ear, uncorrupted amidst odours cognizable by the nose, uncorrupted amidst tastes cognizable by the tongue, uncorrupted amidst touches cognizable by the body, uncorrupted amidst phenomena cognizable by the mind. When a bhikkhu dwells thus, if Mara approaches him through the eye, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him. If Mara approaches him through the ear … through the mind, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him.

"Suppose, friends, there is a peaked house or a hall built of thickly packed clay and freshly plastered. If a man approaches it from the east with a blazing grass torch, or from the west, from the north, from the south, from below, or from above, whichever way he approaches it the fire fails to gain access to it, the fire fails to get a hold on it. So too, friends, when a bhikkhu dwells thus, if Mara approaches him through the eye … through the mind, Mara fails to gain access to him, Mara fails to get a hold on him.

"When a bhikkhu dwells thus, he overwhelms forms; forms do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms sounds; sounds do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms odours; odours do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms tastes; tastes do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms touches; touches do not overwhelm him. He overwhelms phenomena; phenomena do not overwhelm him. This is called, friends, a bhikkhu who overwhelms forms, who overwhelms sounds, who overwhelms odours, who overwhelms tastes, who overwhelms touches, who overwhelms phenomena—one who overwhelms and who is not overwhelmed. He has overwhelmed those harmful unwholesome states that defile, that lead to renewed existence, that bring trouble, that result in suffering, and that lead to future birth, aging, and death.

"It is in this way, friends, that one is uncorrupted."

—SN 35.243[79]

Having established all this, it becomes clearer what the expression "pervading the whole world with friendliness" in the Suttas is pointing at, and that it's not the saccharine "radiating beams of loving-kindness" towards individuals that is typically practiced. Mettā and the brahmavihāras in general are not "skillful fabrications" as they would often be portrayed when people on some level realize that the states they're cultivating are indeed artificial. That sort of effort is rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of what the defilements are.

"Limpid, bhikkhus, is this mind, but it is blemished by adventitious defilements. The untrained worldling does not understand this as it is; therefore I say that for the uninstructed worldling there is no development

[79] See also MN 21.

of the mind."

"Limpid, bhikkhus, is this mind, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The trained noble disciple understands this as it is; therefore I say that for the instructed noble disciple there is development of the mind."

—AN 1.51-52[80]

Since mettā is in reality the primordial attitude of the mind, it would of its own accord become established in a universal, unbiased manner as soon you manage to properly remove from every nook and cranny of your experience the adventitious aversion to displeasure that was obstructing that more fundamental, wider, and unadulterated context. Having not finished, or perhaps not even started that work of *clearing out* and *undoing* the ill will you're responsible for, as opposed to an insufficient *accumulation* and *fabrication* of kindness and benevolence, is the sole reason why the mind is not already established in mettā—effortlessly.

By steadying and frequently abiding in this frame of mind, which you would have simply *uncovered* and not manufactured through wishing and appropriated intention, any possibility for the mind to value sensuality and the world would also have to disappear, and the permanent destruction of all appropriation could eventually come about. That is why the *brahmavihāras* were taught by the Buddha as perfectly viable vehicles to Arahantship.

Restraining the Senses

by *Bhikkhu Anīgha*

At Sāvatthī.

"Bhikkhus, these six contact-fields bring suffering when they're untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained. What six?

The contact-field of the eye brings suffering when it's untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained. The contact-field of the ear … nose … tongue … body …

The contact-field of the mental faculty brings suffering when it's untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained.

These six contact-fields bring suffering when they're untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained.

These six contact-fields bring happiness when they're well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained. What six?

The contact-field of the eye brings happiness when it's well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained. The contact-field of the ear … nose… tongue … body …

The contact-field of the mental faculty brings happiness when it's well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained.

These six contact-fields bring happiness when they're well tamed, well guarded, well protected, and well restrained."

That is what the Buddha said. Then the Holy One, the Teacher, went on to say:

"Bhikkhus, it's just these six contact-fields

Where one unrestrained meets with suffering.

Those who ******understand******* how to restrain them*

live with confidence, not assailed.

When you see pleasant sights

[80] *"Undefiled by the Defilements"*

and unpleasant ones, too,
subdue all manner of desire for the pleasant,
and don't pollute the mind with thoughts of antipathy.
When you hear sounds both agreeable and disagreeable,
don't become enthralled with agreeable sounds,
and subdue aversion for the disagreeable.
Don't pollute the mind with thoughts of antipathy.
When you smell a fragrant, delightful scent,
and one that's foul and unpleasant,
subdue resistance against the unpleasant,
and don't yield to desire for the pleasant.
When partaking of a sweet, delicious taste,
and sometimes those that are bitter,
don't partake of the sweet taste fixated on it,
and don't despise the bitter.
Don't get infatuated with a pleasant pressure
and don't tremble at an unpleasant one.
Look with equanimity at the duality
of pleasant and painful pressures,
without favoring or opposing anything.
People generally let their perceptions proliferate;
perceiving and proliferating, they become engaged.
Expel all thoughts concerned with the mundane,
And go about intent on renunciation.
When the mind is well developed like this
In regard to the six,
it doesn't waver at all in face of pressure.
Bhikkhus, conquer these passions and aversions
And go beyond birth and death!"
—SN 35.94

The development of sense restraint hinges on the discernment of what non-restraint is. "Guarding the sense doors", as it's called in the Suttas, is often inadvertently confused with "sensory deprivation" and blind denial, a mode of practice that is as misguided as careless indulgence.[81] [82]

[81] See also "Unwelcoming of the Hindrances", and "Sense Restraint is Not Just For Monks".
[82] And is typically implemented during so called "meditation retreats".

[Already] contacted, bhikkhus, one feels, ******intends*******, and perceives.*

—SN 35.93[83]

The arisen consciousness of a sense object[84], vague as it may be, is itself what allows you to do anything in regard to it, including restraint. Therefore, sense restraint (*indriyasaṃvara,* lit. "holding back" of the faculties) is about preventing the senses from *going further "into"* the pressuring things that arise of their own accord. This is to be done knowing in advance that the potential increase in engagement and attention will materialize states of passion and aversion that are for now still distant.

The choice to become more involved with a sense experience than you already are is what is referred to in the typical formula found in the Suttas as "grasping at signs and features" (*nimittaggāhī anubyañjanaggāhī).* The signs and features of a thing are not just the particular sensory perceptions of it (shape, color, texture, etc.), but also the entire "world" of significances, feelings, memories, associations, ideas, and intentions associated with it, which proliferates the more you give that thing your attention.

This act of grasping at signs and features can be illustrated by an analogy: when presented with the thumbnail, title, and author of an online video, you already have a rough idea of what it's about and what effect it could have on you, but you haven't clicked on it yet. If you do click and start engaging with its content, the range of its significances (*nimitta/anubyañjana),* which was initially limited to only what was revealed by the thumbnail, will start to widen, and with that your emotional involvement with it.

Similarly, when an object provocative of lust or aversion is presented to any of your six senses, you have a choice to let yourself "descend" into it more—by trying to access it with *other* senses that are not yet in contact with it, by intensifying the experience of a given sense, etc.—or not.[85]

The difference between this and "sense deprivation" is that this requires discernment and cannot be done mindlessly or methodically, and it's not about restraining *everything*.[86]

"Whatever you've shielded the mind from

can't cause you suffering.

So, you should shield the mind from everything,

then you're freed from all suffering."

(The Buddha's reply):

"You needn't shield the mind from everything—

Not the mind that is under control.

[83]It could be said that you have more control over other people's senses than your own (hence the six senses are compared to an empty village liable to attack by bandits in SN 35.238). You can introduce things into someone else's senses that they were entirely unconscious of, but when it comes to yourself, all you can achieve through your own will is to experience something *to a greater degree* (i.e., it must have already been known or "contacted" to some extent at least in mind). The "real" five-sense confirmation of an imaginary experience is simply an increase in intensity of the same thing; it's not a new thing altogether. Therefore, the opposite also applies: you cannot get yourself to totally not experience something volitionally, as the very attempt to do away with it requires you to be aware of *it* at least in imagination. At most, you can intentionally decrease the intensity of things you're currently conscious of by not placing them at the center of your attention. You don't have a final say in exactly when a phenomenon will completely disappear from your overall experience (including the sixth sense) without any residue—and fortunately, it doesn't matter when it does. You would already have a purified mind if there is no delight or resistance throughout its undetermined duration.

[84]Including a mental knowledge that you *may* come across it existing prior to the physical encounter. It's important to understand that the mental faculty is as valid and real as the other five. The experience of a phenomenon does not begin an end with its presence to the five senses.

[85]And the choice to "click" begins with the mind, and is therefore always intentional. You cannot accidentally end up absorbed in the pleasant characteristics of a sight, sound, etc. Similarly, you can cover your eyes each time an enticing sight comes up, but continue to be involved with it on a mental level if you don't discern your intentions clearly enough. "Involvement" includes either delighting in the prospect of it, or anxiously trying to "counter" it and abolish the feeling it evokes: expanding the analogy, the latter would be like clicking on the thumbnails that attract you just to leave a dislike and a negative comment, and on those that repel you just to do the opposite. If you do that, *you are still clicking,* and that is the mistake.

[86]Which is technically impossible, and the attempt to do so is in itself actually a lack of restraint: an intention rooted in aversion. See "You Don't Need to Say 'No' to Everything" and "Sensuality VS Agreeability".

You need only shield the mind

from where the bad things come."

—SN 1.24

Unlike an overzealous total avoidance, perfect sense restraint would not cripple your ability to function externally. All it asks of you is that your actions first and foremost do not transgress the boundaries of the eight precepts, and then that the intention behind whatever you do is not infected with sensual desire, covetousness, ill will, or distraction. The right restraint cannot be "overdone", and the more it is understood, the more natural and effortless it becomes.

It also requires acknowledging the extent of your responsibility and clarifying it further until it becomes perfectly evident—that's it's in *wilfully clicking*, and not in whether thumbnails are presented to you and how appealing they are[87] —as well as the ability to assess your present mental state, without which it's impossible to accurately determine what needs to be restrained, how, and, most importantly, *why*.

Additionally, the attempt to guard the sense doors correctly needs to come with a willingness to put up with a degree of internal discomfort, since that's what will be there if you restrain *yourself* properly instead of trying to push back the world and circumstances. [88]

But when that displeasure is understood, and it is recognized that it stems not from the absence of the desirable "food" for the senses, but from the mind's active resistance to that absence, which is then relinquished, then mere restraint becomes the foundation for the right type of joy. The one that is fully based on renunciation and is devoid of defiling inclinations:

> *"Bhikkhus, I will teach you who lives negligently and who lives diligently. Listen …*
>
> *And how does one live negligently?*
>
> *When one lives with the eye faculty unrestrained, the mind becomes "soaked" in sights cognizable by the eye. When the mind is thus polluted, there's no gladness. When there's no gladness, there's no joy. When there's no joy, there's no calm. When there's no calm, there's unease. When one is uneasy, the mind does not become composed. When the mind is not composed, phenomena are not clear. Since phenomena are not clear, one is considered to live negligently.*
>
> *When one lives with the ear … nose … tongue … body … mental faculty unrestrained, your mind becomes "soaked" in phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty. When the mind is thus polluted, there's no gladness. When there's no gladness, there's no joy. When there's no joy, there's no calm. When there's no calm, there's unease. When one is uneasy, the mind does not become composed. When the mind is not composed, phenomena are not clear. Since phenomena are not clear, one is considered to live negligently.*
>
> *That's how one lives negligently.*
>
> *And how does one live diligently?*
>
> *When one lives with the eye faculty restrained, the mind doesn't become "soaked" in sights cognizable by the eye. When the mind isn't thus polluted, gladness is born. When glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, one is at ease. And when one is at ease, the mind becomes composed. When the mind is composed, phenomena are clear. Because phenomena are clear one is considered to live diligently.*
>
> *When one lives with the ear … nose … tongue … body … mental faculty restrained, the mind doesn't become "soaked" in phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty. When the mind isn't thus polluted,*

[87] Naturally, a lack of sense restraint will bring you to a state of mind where you will be tempted even more—you get a greater number of suggestions for content similar to what you've been "clicking" on recently. But even then, you can't undo the proliferation and wipe the slate clean by choice; you can only work from where you currently are: accept that the new temptations that resulted from carelessness will be lurking around in your mind, and now restrain yourself in regard to *that.* Eventually, the pressure would have to diminish through lack of further fuel.

[88] It is necessary to tailor your environment so you're not too frequently exposed to things that would easily overwhelm you. But never to the point where you place the all the burden of restraint and maintaining internal purity on the outer environment and setup and not your own intentions.

gladness is born. When glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, one is at ease. And when one is at ease, the mind becomes composed. When the mind is composed, phenomena are clear. Because phenomena are clear one is considered to live diligently.

That's how one lives diligently."

—SN 35.97

"*Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has three qualities, he lives* ******full of joy and happiness in the present life*******, and he has laid the groundwork for exhausting the defilements. What three?*

He guards the sense doors, eats in moderation, and is committed to wakefulness.

And how does a bhikkhu guard the sense doors?

"When seeing a sight with the eye, he doesn't grasp at signs and features of it on account of which—due to abiding with the eye faculty unrestrained—bad, detrimental phenomena of longing and upset would flow in on him. He practices to restrain that; he guards the eye faculty and brings about the restraint of the eye faculty.

When hearing a sound with the ear …

When smelling an odor with the nose …

When tasting a flavor with the tongue …

When touching a touch with the body …

When cognizing a phenomenon with the mental faculty, he doesn't grasp at signs and features of it on account of which—due to abiding with the mental faculty unrestrained—bad, detrimental phenomena of longing and upset would flow in on him. He practices to restrain that; he guards the mental faculty and brings about the restraint of the mental faculty."

Suppose a chariot stood harnessed to thoroughbreds at a level crossroads, with a goad ready. Then a deft horse trainer, a master charioteer, might mount the chariot, taking the reins in his right hand and goad in the left. ******He'd drive out and back wherever he wishes, whenever he wishes.******

In the same way, a bhikkhu trains to protect, control, tame, and pacify these six senses.

—SN 35.239

No circumstance or accident can force you to give your attention to something out of lust or ill will, hence the above simile of the master charioteer who is in full control.[89]

The way to prevent the mind from going down the rabbit hole of provoking sense objects is to keep it anchored to a broader context or theme than the particularity and variability of those objects[90]. That is why lack of sense restraint is said to be a consequence of insufficient recollection and awareness *(satisampajaññā)*.[91]

"*And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? When a bhikkhu sees a sight with the eye, if it's agreeable he doesn't harbor passion for it, if it's disagreeable he's not averse to it. He lives with recollection of the body established and with an immeasurable mind. And he understands as it is the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding where those bad, detrimental qualities cease without remainder. When he hears a sound with the ear …When he cognizes a phenomenon with the mental faculty, if it's agreeable*

[89] Even when the senses have to engage with things out of practical necessity that *could* arouse defilements (which, to be sure, does not extend to anything against the precepts), it's perfectly possible to remain mindful of the intention to fulfill that task and nothing more, thereby never becoming preoccupied with the alluring details of the respective objects even as they are present. This is how you would prevent the unavoidable act of eating, the best example of this, from becoming tainted with delight in the agreeability of the food ("Simile of the Son's Flesh").

[90] For another example of this, see "Appointment With Death". The same principle of **yoniso manasikāra** applies to all the various ways of establishing **sati**. A particularly relevant one in the context of restraint is the recollection of the danger in sensuality.

[91] AN 10.61. Trying to immerse yourself in things like bodily sensations and positive mental images or mantras, which is the opposite of *satisampajaññā*, would be choosing non-restraint on one domain so as to restrain another. The right themes of *sati* are wholesome precisely because they can never be "grasped at" in the same way that sense objects can. They don't *capture* your attention, but rather *contextualize* it.

he doesn't harbor passion for it, if it's disagreeable he's not averse to it. He lives with recollection of the body established and with an immeasurable mind. And he understands as it is the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding where those bad, detrimental qualities cease without remainder. It is in such a way that there is restraint.

"*Suppose, bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals—with different domains and different feeding grounds—and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, 'Let me enter an anthill' … as above … The monkey would pull another way, thinking, 'Let me enter a forest.'*

"*Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would stand close to that post or pillar, they would sit down there, they would lie down there. So too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has developed and cultivated recollection of the body, the eye does not pull in the direction of agreeable sights nor are disagreeable forms disturbing; the ear does not pull in the direction of agreeable sounds nor are disagreeable sounds disturbing; the nose does not pull in the direction of agreeable odors nor are disagreeable odors disturbing; the tongue does not pull in the direction of agreeable tastes nor are disagreeable tastes disturbing; the body does not pull in the direction of agreeable tactile objects nor are disagreeable tactile objects disturbing; the mind does not pull in the direction of agreeable mental phenomena nor are disagreeable mental phenomena disturbing.*

"*It is in such a way that there is restraint.*

—SN 35.247[92]

A common mistake that impedes properly targeted restraint is to confuse *preferences*, or "likes and dislikes", with *desires.* But preferences are a matter of each sense "animal" having its own feeding ground, and within that, happening to find some things agreeable and some things less so. This is due to various factors related to your history, environment, and inclinations that have been accumulated through repeated past choices, and is not the issue per se. The real concern is whether the animals are *pulling you* towards what they like and away from what they dislike (and even more importantly, whether you yield). It's paramount to keep that distinction in perspective, since only then will you be able to rightly "tie them to the post" instead of being caught in the two extremes of running along with them and beating them up.

Both of these attitudes can be very subtle and will generally go unnoticed, since one starts out being unclear about the true intention simultaneously underlying one's actions, including the efforts to practice. There is a reason why, in the progression of the Gradual Training[93], one is instructed to take on sense restraint only once the first step of virtue and "seeing the danger in the slightest fault" is well established (which means unwavering observance of the eight precepts at minimum, not only in the letter but in spirit too[94]).

If you have not—as a prerequisite, not even as a guarantee—indefinitely abandoned the possibility to break these precepts in the future and any openness to acting unskilfully by body and speech[95], you *will* be grasping at the signs and features of things that induce unwholesome states on some level, whether you realize it or not. Your intentions for the future, as in the actions that you are at least *open* to doing at some undefined point later on, influence every moment of your present, no matter if you're not planning or dwelling on them at all.

"*Bhikkhus, suppose a sheaf of barley was placed at a crossroads. Then six men would come along carrying flails, and started threshing the sheaf of barley. So that sheaf of barley would be thoroughly threshed by those six flails. Then a seventh man would come along carrying a flail, and he'd give the sheaf of barley a seventh threshing. So that sheaf of barley would be even more thoroughly threshed by that seventh flail.*

[92] "The Six-Sensed Animal"

[93] Found in MN 107, MN 39, among others.

[94] With potential wiggle room when it comes to the sixth precept. See "Accomplished in Virtue".

[95] Keeping one's speech in check, not only bodily activities, is crucial, and the need for it is often overlooked. Uncontrolled speech intrinsically keeps the mind tied to concerns in regard to the agreeable and disagreeable.

In the same way, an unlearned ordinary person is threshed in the eye by both pleasant and unpleasant sights. They're threshed in the ear … nose … tongue … body … mind by both pleasant and unpleasant phenomena. And if that unlearned ordinary person has intentions for being [bhava] again in the future, that inept man is even more thoroughly threshed, like that sheaf of barley threshed by the seventh man.

—SN 35.248

Unyoked from Biology

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

There is no conflict between the scientific understanding of humans as primates subject to inborn biological forces, and the Buddha's seemingly radical proposition that it is possible to have a mind that is entirely devoid of craving, provided both sides of the picture are put in their right place.

How we experience life's various situations is determined by our body, whose nature is fundamentally physiochemical. Things like the ingestion of substances, our age, and the concentration of one hormone or the other in our body can profoundly affect how we feel in relation to an event. And those feelings in turn do have physiological manifestations like pupil dilation, changes in breathing patterns, and so on.

But when the Suttas speak of the destruction of craving, they do not refer to the disappearance or alteration of bodily phenomena such as these. Craving is a tendency that exists *in relation* to how we feel[96], and its sole cause is *ignorance (avijjā)*: something we're certainly responsible for (AN 10.61) and cannot somehow be etched into our bodies, whose propensities we have no ultimate say in. And it is because of this that freedom from craving, and hence any traces of suffering, is perfectly attainable even though we can never completely override our biological conditioning.

There are two extremes: the assumption that we are justified or even required to yield to our natural urges so as to avoid suffering, and the assumption that feelings are the root of the unwholesome (which need not at all be explicit). The former inclines some to doubt the possibility of the ending of craving, and the latter leads the rest to go astray in their efforts to achieve it, even if they're certain of following the Buddhist path. The Buddha's ground-breaking insight centers on the transcendence of these two extremes, not by balancing them out or taking parts of each, but by completely eradicating any traces of both indulgence and denial in the broadest sense, since both are equally the result of ignorance and a mistaken sense of entitlement over experience.

"Friend, how did you cross the flood?"

"Neither standing nor swimming, friend, I crossed the flood."

"But how did you cross the flood neither standing nor swimming?"

"When I stood still, I sank. And when I swam, I was swept away. That's how I crossed the flood neither standing nor swimming."

"After a long time I see

a brahmin extinguished.

Neither standing nor swimming,

he's crossed over attachment to the world."

—SN 1.1

[96] Feeling: known as *vedanā* in the Suttas, which should be understood as the affective quality of an experience—pleasant, unpleasant, or neither—and not as "sensations", which are simply objects of the faculty of touch in the same way as tastes correspond to the tongue. In the context of this essay, *vedanā* is to be taken as a bodily phenomenon. In other words, we are to regard what some may call "subjective" feelings, like the displeasure or sadness connected with the loss of something valuable, as pertaining to the body, even when there is no blatantly physical manifestation of them.

The drives ingrained in our physiology can only *suggest*, strongly as they may, certain actions in certain situations. The smell and sight of food will arouse a pull towards eating it when we're hungry or when our tongue happens to particularly enjoy the taste of what's on offer, or a combination of both. Insults and physical abuse directed at us will produce a sense of displeasure and nuisance that *wants us* to retaliate. The mere presence of these inclinations does not present an issue or involve craving in and of itself, just as a baited hook does not pose a problem for a fish until it bites it.

Recognizing that there is no causal link between our physiological drives and our choices, attitudes, and assumptions infected with craving is how the Middle Way can become intelligible, at least theoretically. No magnitude of these drives, solely on their own, can transform into actions rooted in passion and aversion, and it is owing to this inescapable responsibility for our actions that full destruction of the influxes is achievable[97] while still possessing the very same human body and senses with their individual dispositions.[98]

> *He understands: "Birth is destroyed, the renunciate life has been lived, what has to be done has been done, there will be no more of this". And he understands: "No disturbances dependent on the influxes of sensuality, being, and ignorance are found here; there is only this amount of disturbance—namely, that dependent on this six-sensed body, conditioned by life."*
>
> *—MN 121*

Nibbāna can be described as the state where no matter how forcefully and intimately the urges bound with one's form try to assert themselves and whether they are meritorious or demeritorious, the mind's[99] felt need to *act* in accordance with them—a need that can be categorized as passion, aversion, or carelessness/distraction depending on the type of feeling or pressure—is completely extinguished, through nothing other than right understanding and disenchantment. [100]

> ******"I am not afraid of fear,******
>
> *Our Teacher is skilled in the Deathless.*
>
> *Where fear cannot land—*
>
> *That's the path the bhikkhus walk by."*
>
> *—Theragātha 21*

Therefore, Nibbāna is defined in the Suttas as simply the destruction of these three tendencies without any residue.

> *"Māgaṇḍiya, the eye likes sights, it delights in them and enjoys them. That's been tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained by the Realized One, and he teaches the Dhamma for its restraint…*
>
> *"The ear likes sounds … The nose likes smells … The tongue likes tastes … The body likes touches … The mental faculty (mano) likes mental phenomena, it delights in them and enjoys them. That's been tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained by the Realized One, and he teaches the Dhamma for its restraint."*
>
> *…*
>
> *"What do you think, Māgaṇḍiya? Take someone who used to amuse themselves with sights cognizable by the eye (sounds cognizable by the ear … touches cognizable by the body) that are likable, desirable,*

[97] On the other hand, it is also because of it that we are bound in the first place. If our actions were the direct result of our natural drives, if we weren't fundamentally always free to say either "yes" or "no" to whatever our bodies push us towards, there would be no room for suffering to manifest. Suffering necessitates freedom of choice. In the same vein, denying our responsibility and pretending that our actions "just happen" in direct response to external stimuli just as leaves are blown by the wind ameliorates our suffering, but for the wrong reason. This is why, as the Suttas say, the path can only ever begin with the acceptance of what's sometimes called "mundane right view": that there is action, and that we're responsible for it.

[98] This is how different Arahants in the Suttas would exhibit different traits and proclivities, despite all of them being equally free from the sense of self and conceit.

[99] The "mind" discussed throughout this writing is what's referred to in Pāli as *citta.*

[100] And hence they cannot rightly be called urges anymore, even though their "shape" and significance remain unchanged. Any designations used here could be misconstrued as implying the presence of craving when that's not what is meant. As explained in SN 35.70, this very principle is the essence of the Dhamma, but it can only be experienced by the wise for themselves. It cannot be accurately understood in theory, which is not to say that it is mystical, found in some hidden reality, or is "inexpressible in words".

agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sometime later—having understood as it is the origin, ending, gratification, woe, and escape regarding sights (sounds … touches), and having given up craving and dispelled passion for them—they would live rid of thirst, their mind (citta) ******internally******[101] *at peace. What would you have to say to them, Māgaṇḍiya?"*

"Nothing, Master Gotama."

—MN 75

'Sensuality should be known. And its foundation, diversity, result, cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation should be known.' That's what I said, but why did I say it? There are these five strands of sensuality. Sights cognizable by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear … Smells cognizable by the nose … Tastes cognizable by the tongue … Touches cognizable by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. ******However, these are not sensuality.******* In the training of the Noble One they're called 'strands of sensuality'.*

******Passionate intention******* is a man's sensuality;*

The attractive things in the world aren't sensuality.

Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.

The attractive things remain in the world, just as they are,

But the wise dispel desire for them.

—AN 6.63[102]

This doesn't mean that an Arahant would never submit to the pulls of their body, but that only the neutral ones[103] would potentially be acted upon depending on the situation; all other pressures, *although arisen*, can do nothing but loiter around in vain.

"Bhikkhus, an unlearned ordinary person speaks of the ocean. But that's not the ocean in the training of the Noble One. That's just a large body of water, a large sea of water. The eye is the ocean for a man, and its tide is made of sights.

******One who withstands that tide******* is said to have crossed over the ocean of the eye, with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over, the brahmin stands on firm ground.*

The ear … nose … tongue … body … the mental faculty (mano) is an ocean for a man, and its tide is made of mental phenomena. One who withstands that tide is said to have crossed over the ocean of the mental faculty, with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over, the brahmin stands on firm ground."

—SN 35.228

"Any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni who has not given up passion, aversion, and muddledness is said to have not crossed over the ocean with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni who has given up passion, aversion, and muddledness is said to have crossed over the ocean with its waves and whirlpools, its sharks and monsters. Crossed over and gone beyond, the brahmin stands on firm ground.

—Itivuttaka 69

[101] Cp. footnote 23 below.

[102] It is our individual biological and chemical makeup that determines which things are attractive to us and to what extent. So, "the attractive things remain just as they are" is another way of saying "biology remains unchanged". As stated by the Buddha later in this same discourse, it is intention (*cetanā)* that he calls action (*kamma*). The practice should thus be aimed at addressing the things that we *do* when we feel these biological pulls, not only bodily and verbally, but also through the more refined pathways of mental volition.

[103] Things not found amidst the actions an Arahant is incapable of (AN 9.7).

Nibbāna is also known as the "Undetermined", "Unborn", "Unmade", etc., and this should not be interpreted with any esoteric or mystical connotations. These epithets are meant to convey how it's the only attitude, brought about through wisdom and not happenstance or luck, that is completely not determined and not propelled by any of the drives, coarse or refined, that are linked with our bodies.[104]

Another significant distinction to make is that the *citta*, that which ought to be cleared of defilements, is not synonymous with our brain. The *citta*, if we insist on outlining a relationship between the two, is that which has intentions, views, and attitudes towards what occurs in the brain, i.e., everything (for practical purposes). This includes any concepts, ideas, and mental images, which are the realm of *mano*, as opposed to *citta*.[105]

The mind is by definition a negative phenomenon, in that it lacks a positive or concrete substance by which it can be pinpointed, unlike a chair in a room.[106] [107] For this same reason, the purification of the mind does not necessarily induce any tangible alteration in the manner in which experiences—the positive or actual aspect—manifest. Suffering, just like the mind, is also a negative phenomenon; contrary to our deeply ingrained assumptions, suffering is not the presence of unpleasant feelings and moods, which are in themselves bodily (and positive). Suffering can exist only to the extent to which there is an undefined compulsion to *act in some way* to alter those feelings, superimposed on them without ever actually mixing with them.[108] If that ambiguous compulsion to escape the inescapable is abandoned through understanding, then any unpleasant emotions originating from the brain, regardless of their intensity, will cease to be accompanied by even the smallest amount of anguish: the "second arrow" disappears.[109]

Embracing the view that the mind is the brain or is contained within it, as is not uncommon in modern thought, necessitates rejecting the possibility of individual choice for the sake of logical consistency, closing off the prospect of the deliberate effort required to develop one's mind. [110]

But because these two things are not the same, Nibbāna is not only possible but also fully irreversible. It means that no matter what occurs in the brain and body of a liberated being, whether it's distressing events, a neurological disorder, the unintended psychoactive effects of a drug, or puberty, none of this can *induce* the defilements, since they occur at the level of the *citta*, which is and has always been inherently free to take a stand on whatever the brain presents. [111]

> *Suppose there was a mountain that was one solid mass of rock, without cracks or holes. Even if violent storms were to blow up out of the east, the west, the north, and the south, they couldn't make it shake or*

[104] Bearing in mind that in this context "body" includes the sixth sense base or mental faculty. We are here not concerned with existence in other realms, although the same principle applies. Broadly put, the body (*kāya*, lit. "heap"), physical/biological or otherwise, is that which is "there", arisen independent of one's wishes, pressured by which one feels the pleasures and pains that propel one to make good or bad choices.

[105] In some contexts the two are used synonymously in the Suttas. But in the present context, which is the same as in AN 6.55 quoted below and others like SN 35.246, they are not the same.

[106] And this is why the *citta*, despite this special status, cannot rightly be considered a "soul", a "self", or "mine". In order to be so, it would need to be able to stand on its own feet and not be liable to change, but its very defining trait is that of "being-in-relation-to" other phenomena that are inherently impermanent and bound for destruction, after which there could not be a *citta* in relation to them.

[107] Note also that the ability to recognize what the *citta* is in one's experience is already an outstanding achievement (the stepping stone to stream-entry, see footnote 16), precisely because of its lack of positive characteristics by which it can be pinned down in the way that specific objects can (including thoughts and ideas). This is why the Suttas speak of "picking up the **hint** or **sign (nimitta)"** of the mind, and not of directly "seeing" the mind as a tangible object. This certainly doesn't mean that the mind is "outside" of the five aggregates, which is an impossibility.

[108] This vague (yet most definitely real and often agonizing) impulse to somehow fight back when touched by the six-sense body's pressures is what craving is. This is why it's said to "delight now here and now there" (*tatratatrābhinandinī*); it is by nature never fixed or specific.

[109] The idea that there can be actual *feelings* without any trace of craving or suffering is likely to sound paradoxical, and it should.

[110] The argument that there could be a part of the brain in charge of freedom of choice is untenable. If our actions were solely determined by physical processes, even if some or all of them operated randomly and unpredictably, there would still be no choice or individual responsibility proper: it would always ultimately be "this happened" instead of "I chose to do this". This could easily masquerade as a way of arriving at *anattā and* the cessation of action. But it is a fallacious view, merely rehashed using modern scientific rhetoric, that already existed in the Buddha's time and which he refuted. The Abhidhammic doctrine of "mind moments/processes" is equivalent in spirit, albeit under the guise of idealism instead of materialism. It is motivated by the misconception that any semblance of genuine agency must equal selfhood, failing to see what the sense of self is actually rooted in: the wrong assumptions of permanence, certainty, and satisfaction in relation to our genuinely deliberate choices and what they can achieve.

[111] Which, again, extends as far as affectivity (feelings and moods), not only to so-called "raw sensory data".

rock or tremble.

*In the same way, when a bhikkhu's mind is rightly freed like this, even if intense sights come into the range of the eye, they don't overcome his mind (*******citta*******). His mind remains unaffected. It is steady and immovable, and he maintains perspective of cessation.*

Even if intense sounds … smells… tastes… touches… mental phenomena come into the range of the mental faculty (mano), they don't overcome his mind (citta). His mind remains unaffected. It is steady and immovable, and he maintains perspective of cessation.

—AN 6.55

Consequently, it's a mistake to believe that the extent of someone's liberation can be ascertained through objective data gathered from their brain or physiology. It's not a guarantee that there would be any difference in that area between an Arahant and an ordinary person, and the latter could very well be confused for the former and vice versa. Hence it is stated in the Suttas that an Arahant cannot be defined or measured in terms of the arisen experience, which of course includes the domain of the brain (or the six-sensed body). Even in the case of the jhānas, an objective basis upon which they depend cannot be determined (AN 11.9, MN 25).

Having considered these points, the possibility of *saṃsāra* or "rebirth" also becomes more tangible without a need for mysticism, questionable metaphysical assumptions, or blind faith. Having recognized that the mind cannot lie within the brain or the body[112] if we operate under the premise that our choices are real, and given that craving is an attitude that is superimposed over (bodily) phenomena and is not inherent to them, it follows that there can be no first point at which craving, and the *citta* for that matter, spontaneously emerged. It could not have suddenly appeared the moment we were conceived, since that would necessarily place it within the same domain as our body and sense organs, and this would mean we are forced to be fettered by it for as long as we live. Furthermore, the root of all is ignorance (*avijjā*): it is impossible to be ignorant of something in the present unless we have been ignorant of that same thing in the past too, and this extends back to the moment of our conception, and the time before that, ad infinitum.

"Bhikkhus, no first point of craving for being is evident, before which there was no craving for being, and afterwards it came to be. And although this is said, it is evident that there is a specific support for craving-for-being.

I say that craving-for-being is nourished by something, it's not unnourished. And what is the nutriment of craving-for-being? 'Ignorance,' it should be said.

—AN 10.62

For a long time indeed have I been tricked, cheated, and defrauded by this mind (citta)!

—MN 75

This is how a stream-enterer would, owing to their own discernment and not mere faith, know beyond doubt that this life is not the only one. They would know this with the same certainty they understand the Four Noble Truths or any other aspect of the Dhamma, even if they have no concrete idea or explanation of how "rebirth" would actually play out (which is ultimately irrelevant; the value of the recognition lies only in its arousal of dispassion, not theoretical explanation):

Sāriputta, it is expected of a noble disciple who lives with effort roused up, recollection established, and a composed mind, that they will understand thus: 'This wandering-on (saṃsāra) is indeed beginningless. There is no first discernible point of beings, hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving, transmigrating and wandering on. But the remainderless fading away and cessation of the mass of ignorance—that is the peaceful and sublime state. That is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishment of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, extinguishment. This knowledge of theirs is their faculty of understanding.

[112] And all speculation as to "where" it is is necessarily invalid. The mind is the attitude towards anything and everything that can be found in space, which means that it cannot be *in it.* To be sure, that does not make it permanent or fit to be taken as self or "mine", as already explained.

—SN 48.50

The points here established also serve to highlight why the approach taken towards mental cultivation in contemporary Buddhism at large—centered on meditation techniques and similar exercises—is of not only ineffective but, in fact, *counterproductive* in the very goal it's meant to achieve: a purified and pliable *citta*.

Consciously or not, these practices are done to manipulate the states of the brain[113], and one could only regard them as an aid in the path to freedom from suffering by overlooking, as one experiences them, that those states of the brain—feelings and perceptions of forceful nature—cannot themselves be neither suffering nor the cause of it: by not understanding nor making a proper attempt to understand the Noble Truths.[114]

It doesn't take a Buddha to discover that we suffer when disquiet and unpleasant moods arise, and that we wouldn't suffer if they weren't there: everyone knows that, which is precisely why the natural tendency is to seek external pleasures in hopes of replacing those moods with better ones. It does take a Buddha or an enlightened disciple of his to understand craving for what it is, that it alone is the root of suffering, and how to abandon it. Hence, without the Right View of a *sotāpanna*, who is no longer liable to confuse their feelings and moods with craving and vice versa, the majority of one's attempts to rid oneself of suffering are likely to be missing the mark.

The Buddha stated that it's not possible to fulfill Right View, fulfill Right Composure, or abandon the defilements, without having for oneself recognized the "signs" of the mind within the present experience (AN 6.68): anything that one might imagine suffering, craving, or the five hindrances to be before that point will be inaccurate. The only thing every practitioner can be sure about from the beginning is that actions contrary to the precepts involve craving, whether they're able to recognize their *citta* or not, and from this starting point they would have to gradually refine their discernment by sequentially following the Gradual Training (MN 107), in which meditation proper is a very late stage.

To most, the absence of palpable[115] suffering might appear to be all that matters. It isn't, and even then, the way meditation is almost universally practiced brings one to it through the wrong avenue: they get the *citta* to a calm state by taking the winds that were blowing on it out of the picture, even if the stated aim is otherwise. The mind itself remains brittle and unable to withstand the full extent of the forces inherent to the body that it's paired with, which would become apparent if circumstances were to push the brain back to baseline. And, quite crucially, sickness, aging, and death are just such type of powerful pressures that one will sooner or later be unable to evade. The liability to suffer on account of them, or of any other unforeseen events that would challenge one *far* beyond one's tolerance threshold, has not fundamentally changed.

Three things are coming,

like a mass of flame:

death, disease, and aging.

No power can stand before them,

and no speed's enough to flee.

—Theragātha 6.13

[113] An attempt that can be quite successful as proven by scientific studies. The vast majority of practitioners tacitly assume, even when they don't approach meditation through a scientific or secular lens, that their attention span is a measure of their *samādhi*. But *samādhi*, particularly the first *jhāna,* is about the unification of the *citta* (*cittekaggatā*) into wholesome states and an unmuddled perspective, not the unification of the brain's processes into specific objects (AN 11.9, AN 4.12, AN 3.63). The former is a much subtler affair. MN 138 defines "scatteredness" as the presence of *passion* in relation to sense objects; AN 4.77 puts the range or field *(visaya)* of one in jhāna among four things that cannot be delineated. It is not tied down to any particular content or perceptions, and yet the mind *is* undeniably well-unified. What's being described here is evidently not "absorption", but it should not be conflated with so-called "jhāna-lite" nor "open awareness" approaches either. Those are also tangential to the purification of the *citta,* evidenced by how a first-hand recognition of its subtle and indirect nature is not absolutely indispensable for them (SN 47.8).

[114] Naturally, teachers and practitioners will tend to conceptually align the techniques they teach and adhere to with the central Buddhist frameworks, but that doesn't change the reality of what's actually taking place when one succeeds in them.

[115] i.e., positive, which *dukkha* inherently is not, as explained above.

The Suttas do mention bodily calm (*kāya-passaddhi*) as an awakening factor, and it is certainly a property of right *samādhi*. But the critical difference is that it comes as a by-product of relinquishing all unwholesome types of volition[116] in regard to the brain's natural tendencies[117]. It is a by-product of giving up the five hindrances, which are always defined as defilements of the *citta* (AN 5.23), and are nourished precisely by misconduct of body, speech, and thought (AN 10.62). Making an effort to appease the body (brain) and what it feels in relation to sense objects, instead of the less palpable *desire to act* that is superimposed over that, is taking things in the wrong order, and inevitably leads to the wrong result:

> *"Bhikkhus, endowed with five factors, a bhikkhu is incapable of attaining right composure (sammāsamādhi): he is unable to endure sights, unable to endure sounds, unable to endure smells, unable to endure tastes, and unable to endure touches."*
>
> *—AN 5.113*[118]

> *"Considering how these five hindrances are abandoned in himself, gladness is born. For one who is glad, joy is born.* ******When the mind (citta) is glad, the body calms down.****** *One with a calm body feels at ease. For one who is at ease, the mind becomes composed."*
>
> *—DN 2*

> *"Bhikkhus, this mind (citta) is radiant. And it is blemished by adventitious defilements. The unlearned ordinary person does not understand this as it is. Therefore I say that for the unlearned ordinary person, there is no development of the mind."*
>
> *"Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant. And it is liberated from adventitious defilements. A learned noble disciple understands this as it is. Therefore I say that for the learned noble disciple, there is development of the mind."*
>
> *—AN 1.51-52*[119]

In contrast, virtue—often neglected or insufficiently emphasized in comparison with these widespread techniques—is repeatedly presented in the Suttas as the indispensable precondition and basis for any proper meditation and **samādhi**. Virtue does actually contribute to the development, pliability, and resilience of one's *citta*, though the idea of it is naturally less appealing. This is because virtue in the context of the Dhamma and training is nothing other than abstaining, regardless of the state of the brain at any given time, from any bodily or verbal choices (again, *cetanā*) that would involve craving in relation to said state.[120] At the most elemental level, it partakes in the principle of withstanding and not yielding to one's biology without denying it or trying to make it otherwise, and it is only when established upon this foundation that one's efforts can be upscaled to the more refined planes in which bodily pressures are still being taken up, eventually also resulting in those pressures themselves subsiding, but *for the right reason*.[121]

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[116] *Cetanā*, which, not by coincidence, derives from the same root *√cit* as *citta*.

[117] SN 46.51: paying the wrong type of attention to these natural phenomena is what nourishes the five hindrances, not the *presence* of these phenomena.

[118] In fact, the first jhāna is called "the opening amidst confinement", the "confinement" being the five senses and their agreeable and enticing objects. It's not a separate state where those objects or their pressure are no longer perceived, but a state where the *citta* has not the slightest plan to succumb to them (which is what constitutes all of the five hindrances) no matter how long they last. That is where the sense of joy and safety originates from. Hence it is also said that it is impossible to enter the first jhāna without having thoroughly discerned the danger in sensuality (AN 6.73), since that is what "trains" the mind (SN 35.246) to no longer yield even when cornered on all sides by the body's inclinations—just as a person would refuse any attempts to be thrust into a pit of burning coals (SN 35.244). See also MN 125, specifically the simile of the tamed royal elephant who no longer flinches even in the face of fierce provocation.

[119] The way defilements and suffering superimpose themselves upon what we feel could be compared to two identical panes of glass joined together, except one of them has a colored tint. For one who doesn't know better, it will genuinely seem like there is only *one tinted pane*, and thus in order to get rid of the tint, the entire structure needs to be removed. Similarly, the natural and implied tendency is to want to eliminate or replace the whole arisen experience (particularly unpleasant or strong emotions) when trying to clear away suffering and defilements, and this is precisely what a meditation technique helps one do.

[120] Generosity is also extensively emphasized along with virtue in the context of lay practice in the Suttas, while meditation proper comes into the picture only once virtue has been well developed. Generosity not only provides mundane benefits for the brain but also cultivates the *citta*, as it goes against our ingrained biological tendency for possessiveness. This is also why it has a profound effect on one's future births.

[121] This "external" calm will always be temporary, however. See SN 17.30.

Bhante, it would be great if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in brief, so that having heard it I may dwell alone, withdrawn, heedful, diligent, and resolute.

Bhikkhu, you should purify the very foundation of all wholesome qualities. And what is that foundation? Well-purified virtue, and correct view. When your virtue is well purified and your view is correct, then you should develop the four foundations of recollection, founded and established upon virtue.

—SN 47.3[122]

The Cues of the Mind

By Bhikkhu Anīgha

We habitually employ external, objective standpoints to gauge the character of our own actions. Among these are the various possibilities listed below:

"Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission, by lineage, by hearsay, by canonical authority, by logic, by inference, by analysis of properties, by the acceptance of a view after consideration, by the appearance of competence, or by the thought 'The ascetic is our respected teacher.' When you know for yourselves: 'These things are detrimental, blameworthy, criticized by sensible people, and when undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering', then you should give them up.

What do you think, Kālāmas? When greed … aversion … muddledness arises ******internally******* for a person, does it do so for their welfare or harm?"*

"Harm, Bhante."

…

"What do you think, Kālāmas, are these things beneficial or detrimental?"

"Detrimental, Bhante."

"Blameworthy or blameless?"

"Blameworthy, Bhante."

"Criticized or praised by sensible people?"

"Criticized by sensible people, Bhante."

"When undertaken, do they lead to harm and suffering, or not? Or how do you see this?"

"When undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering, Bhante. That's how we see it."

"So, Kālāmas, when I said: 'Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission, by lineage, by hearsay, by canonical authority, by logic, by inference, by analysis of properties, by the acceptance of a view after consideration, by the appearance of competence, or by the thought 'The ascetic is our respected teacher.' But when you know for yourselves: 'These things are detrimental, blameworthy, criticized by sensible people, and when undertaken, they lead to harm and suffering', then you should give them up. That's what I said, and this is why I said it."

—AN 3.65

We also cannot rely on the way we feel to determine what's beneficial and what isn't:

"Sights, sounds, tastes, smells,

touches, and phenomena, the lot of them—

they're said to be likable, desirable, and agreeable

[122] It is telling that although the Buddha's interlocutor here (as well as in SN 47.3, SN 47.15-16, SN 47.46-47, AN 4.12, and many others) was already a *bhikkhu*, the importance of virtue still had to be emphasized.

for as long as they exist.

For all the world with its gods,

this is what they deem happiness.

And where they cease

is deemed as suffering for them.

The noble ones have seen as happiness

the cessation of personality.

This insight of those who see

contradicts the whole world.

What others call happiness

the noble ones say is suffering.

What others call suffering

the noble ones know as happiness.

—Snp 3.12

This famous teaching given to the Kālāmas can only be followed and all doubts eventually transcended if one becomes aware of what the Suttas call the "sign" or "cue" of the mind (*cittassa nimitta).* This means one must train oneself to recognize the subconscious[123] attitude that drives one's actions by body, speech, or thought at any given time.

Our default mode of being is to be absorbed in whatever our attention is focused on. Almost always, it feels like there is nothing else in our experience but *this* (whatever we happen to be occupied with)[124] . But there always has to be, whether we're aware of it or not, an **attitude** towards "this" that we're implicitly harboring. That background—we may even say "ambiguous"—mode of relating to an experience exists simultaneously with it but on a different plane; one does not come first and the other later. And this attitude is ultimately more general than anything we direct our attention to; it *endures* while our attention goes from this to that, whether the object is internal or external, concrete or abstract, and past, present, or future. It is in that peripheral direction to the aspects of experience we tend to wrongly emphasize that both bondage and freedom are found.[125]

Whenever one is unaware of this background frame of mind, one's development of certain things and avoidance of others will *have to* rely on hearsay, reasoning, inference, acquired views, etc., and that alone negates one's efforts, even if they happen to be perfectly in line with the letter of the Buddha's instructions. You don't need to be negligent and forget about the teachings altogether to end up going with the grain of ignorance. All it takes is not clearly seeing where that grain is, irrespective of your earnest attempts to go against it. Hence, the purification of the mind cannot take place fortuitously, by adhering to a prescribed set of instructions without seeing for yourself what and "where" the defilements are on every occasion. All Dhamma instruction you receive is like a map: if you don't know where you currently stand, no matter how accurately the map displays the whole territory and the destination—the cessation of greed, aversion, and delusion—it won't help you get there.

[123]The use of this word must be qualified: the dispositions of the mind are not literally "below" your consciousness, which would render them effectively inaccessible. They are *peripheral* to whatever you are centrally conscious of. In other words, they are definitely "there" at all times, but are simply overlooked. And, of course, they are no longer "subconscious" once they cease to be overlooked. This is also what the Suttas refer to as "underlying tendencies" (*anusaya,* lit. "lying down alongside").

[124]We are by default too concerned with objects, and emphasizing that direction further makes things even worse. The Dhamma is not about striving for perfect objectivity or "unbiased" observation: *dukkha* is an entirely personal and subjective affair, and subjectivity can only be properly disowned, as opposed to merely concealed from view while it's in fact still there, if it's first fully acknowledged, taken into account, and understood.

[125]Some actions are on every conceivable instance propelled by the same mind states, which is why they're excluded by the precepts. If it were possible to do them with a clean mind, there would be no issue with them.

Noticing the current state of the mind is an act of *acknowledging* something that you were previously either covering up or simply overlooking. It has nothing to do with closely observing a continuous flow of experiences[126]. What enables this recognition is not concentration or focus, but self-awareness[127] (the antithesis of concentration) and self-honesty. It's the opposite direction of zooming in to examine the intricate pattern of threads on a piece of fabric and is instead more akin to noticing how your nose is always inevitably at the center of your field of vision, no matter how engrossed you become in the objects you see. This background to your attention cannot be attended to head-on in the same way as things that are seen, heard, thought, etc., for it simply cannot exist in that palpable way.

> *"Sandha, meditate like a thoroughbred, not like a wild colt.*
>
> *And how does a wild colt meditate? A wild colt, tied up by the feeding trough, meditates: 'Fodder, fodder!' Why is that? Because it doesn't occur to the wild colt tied up by the feeding trough: 'What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?' Tied up by the feeding trough it just meditates: 'Fodder, fodder!'*
>
> *In the same way, take a certain untrained person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut. Their mind is overcome and mired in sensual desire, and they don't understand as it is the escape from arisen sensual desire.* ******Harboring sensual desire internally*******, they meditate and contemplate and cogitate and ruminate. Their mind is overcome by ill will … indolence-and-lethargy … restlessness-and-anxiety … doubt … Harboring doubt internally, they meditate and contemplate and cogitate and ruminate. They meditate dependent on earth, water, fire, and air. They meditate dependent on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. They meditate dependent on this world or the other world.* ******They meditate dependent on what is seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty.******* That's how an untrained person meditates.*
>
> *And how does a thoroughbred meditate? A fine thoroughbred, tied up by the feeding trough, doesn't meditate: 'Fodder, fodder!' Why is that? Because it occurs to the fine thoroughbred tied up by the feeding trough: 'What task will the horse trainer have me do today? How should I respond?' Tied up by the feeding trough they don't meditate: 'Fodder, fodder!' For that fine thoroughbred regards the use of the goad as a debt, a bond, a loss, a misfortune.*
>
> *In the same way, take a certain fine thoroughbred person who has gone to the forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut. Their mind is not overcome and mired in sensual desire, and they understand as it is the escape from arisen sensual desire. Their mind is not overcome by ill will … indolence-and-lethargy … restlessness-and-anxiety … doubt … They don't meditate dependent on earth, water, fire, and air. They don't meditate dependent on the extent of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or neither-perception-nor-non-perception. They don't meditate dependent on this world or the other world.* ******They don't meditate dependent on what is seen, heard, thought, cognized, attained, sought, or explored by the mental faculty. Yet they do meditate.******
>
> *—AN 11.9*

If you attempt to observe and analyze your agitated mind like you would an object in the world, that would all remain secondary to the internal presence of that restlessness. The only way to become aware of the current tendency of the mind is *indirectly:* while attention is where it is, you try to simultaneously become aware of "how" your mind is at this time,[128] similar to how you would remember the space that you're

[126] All notions of "processes", "streams", "sequences", and "mind-moments" must be put aside in order to understand not only the subject of this essay but the Dhamma in general, which by definition is "not involving time" (*akālika*). One must learn to see every present experience as a *totality*, with general aspects that endure (say, an irritable mood) while other more specific aspects (thoughts about some person or event) shift and change.

[127] In order to properly understand *anattā*, one must first develop thorough self-awareness of the type described here. When you don't, that which you think of as the sense of self will not be the actual sense of self, but a secondary expression of it. The difficulty of transcending ownership is not in making sense of *anattā* per se, but in that one does not fully see the extent of what is, or *can*, be taken as self: one cannot see the *sabbe dhammā* part of *sabbe dhammā anattā*. The inclinations of the mind, due to their lack of tangible detail in comparison to the sense objects and perceptions one is used to, is chief among the phenomena that are liable to be overlooked, and to the extent that you don't see them, the statement, "Everything is not self," doesn't actually apply to them.

[128] And there is no fixed right answer. The designations you use to describe the status of your mind are secondary; what matters is

currently in without having to actually *look* at the walls, floors, and ceiling of the room. This is what would reveal the character of any act you're doing or want to do.

> *And how does a bhikkhu abide maintaining perspective of the mind concurrently with the mind?*
>
> *Here, a bhikkhu understands mind with passion as 'mind with passion,' and mind without passion as 'mind without passion.' He understands mind with aversion as 'mind with aversion,' and mind without aversion as 'mind without aversion.' He understands mind with muddledness as 'mind with muddledness,' and mind without muddledness as 'mind without muddledness.' He understands constricted mind as 'constricted mind,' and scattered mind as 'scattered mind.' He understands expansive mind as 'expansive mind,' and unexpansive mind as 'unexpansive mind.' He understands mind that is not supreme as 'mind that is not supreme,' and mind that is supreme as 'mind that is supreme.' He understands mind composed as 'mind composed,' and mind not composed as 'mind not composed.' He understands liberated mind as 'liberated mind,' and unliberated mind as 'unliberated mind.'*
>
> *And so he abides maintaining perspective of the mind concurrently with the mind internally, externally, and both internally and externally. He abides maintaining perspective of the mind as liable to rise, or as liable to wane, or as liable to both rise and wane concurrently with the mind. Or the memory that 'the mind is there' is established for him just to the extent necessary for knowledge and recollection. He abides disengaged, not taking up anything in the world.*
>
> *—MN 10*

Everyone already has at least a minimal capacity to know what state their mind is in, so it's not that this requires uncovering an altogether hidden dimension. The issue is that the untrained individual is usually aware of their mental state only to the degree that it's displayed by their bodily and verbal behavior—meaning when it's quite coarse.[129] Since this is the inevitable starting point, the training of the mind needs to take place "backwards", as it were. Every action is determined as right or wrong by the type of mind underlying it, but since the attitudes driving bodily and verbal acts are much easier to notice compared to what takes place purely on the mental domain, it's necessary to start purifying the former before the subtleties of the latter can start to be revealed. Thus, the purification of mind becomes an option only after the purification of virtue.[130]

Take an act that from an external standpoint would seem pure and even praiseworthy: volunteering for community service, for instance. If you're not aware of your internal intention underneath that, you would tend to tacitly assume that the action is beneficial due to its external properties, e.g., what other people agree upon as good and how it makes you feel superficially, overlooking the fact that what's really acting as the motivator *for you* at that time could be a simple thirst for company, distraction, idle talk, and perhaps an opportunity to enjoy sense pleasures at some point. In this way, states that lead to your own harm would be unwittingly tolerated, welcomed, and acted upon, potentially even while believing them to be the opposite[131]. The less you are able to pick up the cues of your mind, the more you'd be liable to this sort of unconscious self-sabotage through your own actions. Your mind will never go out of its way to warn you when greed, aversion, or distraction are the ones running the show. Quite the opposite: it actively tries to mislead you.[132]

The same principle extends to the domain of purely mental actions in a much subtler way. You can be applying the mind in beneficial ways on paper, and yet that doesn't stop greedy, averse, and deluded motivations

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that they're coming *from* the present awareness of the mind and not the other way around, in which case the designations become abstract and based upon hearsay, reasoning, views, etc.

[129] This is why some people go as far as the view that their own thoughts are "not real", or at least less so, in comparison with the physical world. Similarly, many turn to the sphere of bodily sensations thinking that it can accurately reveal the state of their mind, failing to see that the subtler and most critical aspects of it cannot manifest on that perceptible level no matter how closely they examine it.

[130] And purification of view comes only as a result of the purification of mind (MN 24).

[131] In certain cases you don't need to completely avoid an external action if you realize it was or would have been wrongly motivated, however. If there is some greater purpose that justifies the activity, remaining mindful not to engage in distraction and carelessness even if the opportunity presents itself would keep the mind clean.

[132] The five aggregates can be compared to a killer in the guise of a polite, loyal, and trustworthy servant (SN 22.85).

that masquerade as good from propelling your efforts:

> *"Bhikkhus, suppose a foolish, incompetent, unskillful cook was to serve a king or his minister with a vast array of curries: superbly sour, bitter, pungent, and sweet; hot and mild, salty and bland.*
>
> *But that cook didn't pick up the cue of his own master: 'Today, my master preferred this sauce, or he reached for it, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it. Today, my master preferred the sour or bitter or pungent or sweet or hot or mild or salty sauce. Or he preferred the bland sauce, or he reached for the bland one, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it.'*
>
> *That foolish, incompetent, unskillful cook doesn't get presented with clothes, wages, or bonuses. Why is that? Because he doesn't pick up the cue of his own master.*
>
> *In the same way, a foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body—diligent, aware, and recollected, having subdued longing and upset in regard to the world. As he abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body, his mind does not become composed, and the defilements are not given up. He doesn't pick up that cue. … feelings … mind … phenomena …*
>
> *That foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu doesn't gain comfortable abidings right in the present experience, nor does he gain recollection-and-awareness. Why is that? Because that foolish, incompetent, unskillful bhikkhu does not pick up the cue of his own mind.*
>
> *Suppose an astute, competent, skillful cook was to serve a ruler or their minister with a vast array of curries: superbly sour, bitter, pungent, and sweet; hot and mild, salty and bland.*
>
> *And that cook picked up the cue of his own master: 'Today my master preferred this sauce, or he reached for it, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it. Today my master preferred the sour or bitter or pungent or sweet or hot or mild or salty sauce. Or he preferred the bland sauce, or he reached for the bland one, or he took a lot of it, or he praised it.'*
>
> *That astute, competent, skillful cook gets presented with clothes, wages, and bonuses. Why is that? Because he picks up the cue of his own master.*
>
> *In the same way, a wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body—diligent, aware, and recollected, having subdued longing and upset in regard to the world. As he abides maintaining perspective of the body concurrently with the body, his mind becomes composed, and the defilements are given up. He picks up that cue. … feelings … mind … phenomena …*
>
> *That wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu gains comfortable abidings right in the present experience, and he gains recollection-and-awareness. Why is that? Because that wise, competent, skillful bhikkhu picks up the cue of his own mind."*
>
> *—SN 47.8*

The cook would fail to pick up the cues of his master if he's thinking in *objective* terms about which dishes would please the king. Similarly, people often operate from a belief that just following this or that practice, since it's prescribed by the Buddha or a teacher, in itself takes them in the right direction. It's never that simple, so one must be very wary of the tendency to make the Dhamma methodical and structured. That automatically obscures the domain that effort must apply to since the mind is not at all guaranteed to be slanting in the same direction on two different occasions.

The "food" that you provide to the mind, knowingly or unknowingly, is primarily the intention behind your actions and even thoughts, not the actions or thoughts themselves. This is why a *sotāpanna* does not misconceive specific practices and observances (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) of any kind as vehicles to purity per se: they fully understand that it's about the message they're indirectly passing to their mind at the background, not about what they specifically do, say, or think. In contrast, an ordinary person depends on certain habits and behaviors as proxies to *hopefully* affect the direction their mind is going in. This works neither flawlessly nor permanently, which is why a degree of variation is often necessary.

Let's take the example of **mettā** meditation. If you overlook that ill-will starts with your tacit attitude of not wanting to feel whatever you're currently feeling—if you don't pick up that cue— the entire project of developing *mettā* will be accompanied by a silent aversion at its core, while you generate foreground thoughts and emotions of kindness. Right intention is not established at the right level, which is why the effect of this practice always eventually wears out, like a weed that regrows because it was only trimmed, without touching its roots.

> *Regarding what's not the core as the core,*
>
> *and seeing the core as not the core;*
>
> *they don't get to the core.*
>
> *Wrong intention is their pasture.*
>
> *But having known the core as the core,*
>
> *and what's not the core as not the core;*
>
> *they get to the core.*
>
> *Right intention is their pasture.*
>
> *—Dhp 12*

Constant self-questioning of the motivation behind *whatever* you do is therefore not optional[133], and is closer to right meditation than anything else you might do while taking your intention behind it for granted:

> *What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?"*
>
> *"It's for inspection, Bhante."*
>
> *"In the same way, actions of body, speech, and thought should be done only after repeated inspection.*
>
> *When you want to act with the body, you should inspect that act: 'Does this act with the body that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?'*[134] *If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I want to do leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, it yields suffering and results in suffering.' To the best of your ability, Rāhula, you should not do such an action. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I want to do doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should do such an action.*
>
> *While you are acting with the body, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act with the body that I am doing lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?' If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I am doing leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's unskillful, with suffering as its outcome and result.' Then, Rāhula, you should desist from such an act. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I am doing doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should continue such an act.*
>
> *After you have acted with the body, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act with the body that I have done lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? Is it detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering?' If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should confess, reveal, and clarify such an act to the Teacher or a sensible fellow renunciate. And having revealed it you should restrain yourself in the future. But*

[133] This is where authenticity or self-transparency comes in, hence the Buddha's comparison with looking at oneself in a mirror. One of the main obstacles to being aware of what state the mind is actually in is that one often doesn't even want to admit it, since it takes away the certainty one may have found in adhering to a fixed course of action previously assumed to be always "good".

[134] The affliction is always due to the simultaneously present greed, aversion, or delusion. Whether the outcome of the act is gain or loss, fame or disrepute, praise or blame, or pleasure or pain, is not what matters.

if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act with the body that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.

When you want to act with speech, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act of speech that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? …' …

If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act of speech that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should confess, reveal, and clarify such an act to the Teacher or a sensible fellow renunciate. And having revealed it you should restrain yourself in the future. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act of speech that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.

When you want to act by thought, you should inspect that same act: 'Does this act by thought that I want to do lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both? …' …

If, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act by thought that I have done leads to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's detrimental, yielding suffering and resulting in suffering.' Then, Rāhula, you should be horrified, repelled, and disgusted by that act. And being repelled, you should restrain yourself in the future. But if, while inspecting in this way, you know: 'This act by thought that I have done doesn't lead to my affliction, to that of others, or to that of both. It's beneficial, yielding ease and resulting in ease.' Then, Rāhula, you should live in joy and gladness because of this, training day and night in beneficial qualities.

All* ******the ascetics and brahmins of the past, future, and present who purify their actions by body, speech, and thought do so after repeatedly inspecting.******* So, Rāhula, you should train yourself like this: 'Repeatedly inspecting, I will purify my actions of body, speech, and thought.' "*

—MN 61

This same effort of continuously holding a mirror to one's mind is what defines the practice of mindfulness-and-awareness, which is why, as stated in the simile of the cook discourse further above, there is no proper *satisampajaññā* unless one can pick up the cues of the *citta:*

"Now, bhikkhus, you might think, 'We have a sense of prudence and fear of wrongdoing, and our bodily, verbal, and mental behavior is pure, our livelihood is pure, our sense doors are guarded, we are moderate in eating, and we are dedicated to vigilance. Just this much is enough. We have achieved the goal of life as an ascetic. There is nothing more to do.' And you might rest content with just that much. I declare this to you, bhikkhus, I announce this to you: 'You who seek to be true contemplatives, do not lose sight of the goal of the contemplative life while there is still more to do.'

What more is there to do? You should train yourselves like this: 'We will have mindfulness-and-awareness. We will act with awareness when going out and coming back; when looking ahead and aside; when bending and extending the limbs; when bearing the outer robe, bowl, and robes; when eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting; when urinating and defecating; when walking, standing, sitting, sleeping, waking, speaking, and keeping silent. [135]*'*

—MN 39

Both **yoniso manasikāra** and the utterance of another are necessary for the acquisition of the right view. The reason is that the right view is about much more than agreeing with universal, impersonal facts and notions you heard or read about. As much as the unenlightened person may agree with the Buddha's declaration

[135] Note how, in stark contrast to the principles outlined so far, this is frequently interpreted as a careful observation of bodily sensations and movements. This actively obstructs any possibility to pick up on what's happening at the back of one's mind.

of the Four Noble Truths, what they may think of as suffering and craving is not accurate enough[136] simply because they are not sufficiently acquainted with the peripheral aspects of their mind.

> *"Bhikkhus, it's impossible that a bhikkhu who enjoys association and company, who is fond of them and is devoted to enjoying them, would enjoy being alone in seclusion. Not enjoying being alone in seclusion, it's impossible that he will take the cues of the mind.* ******Not taking the cues of the mind, it's impossible that he will fulfill Right View. *******Having not fulfilled Right View, it's impossible that he will fulfill Right Composure (sammāsamādhi). Having not fulfilled Right Composure, it's impossible that he will give up the fetters. Having not given up the fetters, it's impossible that he will realize Nibbāna.*
>
> *But, bhikkhus, it's possible that a bhikkhu who doesn't enjoy association and company, who isn't fond of them and isn't devoted to enjoying them, would enjoy being alone in seclusion. Enjoying being alone in seclusion, it's possible that he will take the cues of the mind. Taking the cues of the mind, it's possible that he will fulfill Right View. Having fulfilled Right View, it's possible that he will fulfill Right Composure. Having fulfilled Right Composure, it's possible that he will give up the fetters. Having given up the fetters, it's possible that he will realize Nibbāna."*
>
> *—AN 6.68*

It's important not to expect any kind of sudden epiphanies.[137] Skill in picking up the cues of your own mind is the result of *training*, working against the grain of the tendency to overlook the internal impetus behind your actions, and getting in the habit of judging them as good or bad solely based on that. Over time, it becomes increasingly harder to overlook your own underlying tendencies, and, unlike before, falling prey to them begins to require active negligence as opposed to being the default.

Apart from this effort of radically self-honest reflection, it's also critical to become used to dwelling in seclusion and withdrawal for large portions of the day, not just physically from other people, but also from any distracting engagements, external or otherwise, that would prevent you from maintaining clear awareness and a healthy skepticism of the motivation that lies behind those very activities[138]. This proper seclusion amplifies the symptoms[139] of the core problem even though you may still not be able to see the problem itself. The cues you need to pick up on start to at least show themselves, so resisting the impulse to resolve the symptoms would gradually familiarize you with the *simultaneously present* cause of them, and the true purpose of all the practices taught by the Buddha would start to become apparent.

Developing Stream-entry

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

The Nature of Understanding There are several misconceptions surrounding the subject of stream-entry and attainments in general. One of the most problematic is the tendency to conceive of it as a sudden, unprovoked revelation, epiphany, or glimpse of a mystical kind. In this view, unusual perceptions and experiences that have no intrinsic meaning and can be interpreted in a myriad ways are conflated with *knowledge* or *understanding (paññā).* Understanding cannot arise by itself in the manner that perceptions and experiences do.

Just as in ordinary life, understanding can arise only if you've been *trying to understand* from the get-go. Some individuals can understand things more quickly than others, but no one wakes up one day knowing how to assemble a car from scratch without any prior effort on their part. And yet this is how awakening is often thought to be like, to the point that some people even believe psychoactive drugs can give rise to Buddhist

[136] *Sotāpatti* is reached by polishing, upgrading, and sometimes even completely overhauling your understanding as many times as it takes based on faith in the utterance of another who reached it themselves, not by embracing your *current* notions of suffering, its origin, and its cessation, and practicing according to them until a result is reached.

[137] There is no abrupt realization of the Dhamma (AN 8.19).

[138] A prominent example of such distractions is meditation techniques.

[139] Which may be too unpleasant if you're not already accustomed to virtue and sense restraint.

insights. This reveals that what they think of as understanding is just perceptions, as sophisticated and esoteric as they may be[140]. Someone who has no idea how to change the oil of a car's engine can suddenly have intricate visions of moving pistons and turning gears, but a seasoned mechanic's *understanding* of cars is something different, not only in magnitude but in nature, and does not magically follow from the former.

Furthermore, unlike perceptions, understanding is not subjective or individualized, as the Dhamma is sometimes thought to be. Your understanding is either in line with the Dhamma and thus leads to the complete destruction of ignorance and craving in regard to it, or it isn't, and thus there is a *mis*-understanding, which in means ignorance and craving still remain one way or another.

Purification of Mind -> Purification of View Whether it's the first stage of awakening or any later one, progress always boils down to the weakening of the fetters, and this progress is always necessarily gradual. *If and when* those fetters have weakened, the understanding that finally destroys them can arise, not before that, and not all of a sudden. This doesn't mean one can anticipate how long that weakening will take, however. All one can do is live in such a way that the fetters are wearing away, indefinitely:

> *"The ocean gradually slants, slopes, and inclines, with no abrupt precipice. In the same way, in this teaching and training, the penetration to higher knowledge comes from gradual training, progress, and practice,* ******not abruptly*******. Having seen this first marvellous and extraordinary quality of this teaching and training, the bhikkhus delight in it."*[141]
> —AN 8.19

> *"Suppose a carpenter or his apprentice sees the marks of his fingers and thumb on the handle of his adze. He doesn't know how much of the handle was worn away today, how much yesterday, and how much previously. He just knows 'it's worn away' once it's already worn away.*
>
> *In the same way, when a bhikkhu lives committed to development, he doesn't know how much of the defilements were worn away today, how much yesterday, and how much previously.* ******He only knows 'they've worn away' once they've already worn away.******* Suppose there was a sea-faring ship bound together with ropes. For six months they deteriorated in the water. Then in the cold season it was hauled up on dry land, where the ropes were weathered by wind and sun. When the clouds soaked it with rain, the ropes would readily weaken and decay. In the same way, when a bhikkhu lives committed to development, his fetters readily weaken and decay."
> —SN 22.101*

This is how it was possible for many individuals who met the Buddha to attain the Right View in what seemed like a sudden event during a conversation with him: their starting point was one of weaker fetters and/or stronger faculties to begin with. As he realized when considering whether he should teach the Dhamma to the world, some beings are like lotuses sitting just under the water's surface, ready to rise, while others are still far at the bottom of the pond, with much growth ahead of them.[142]

While one does not have an immediate say over one's faculties, one does have more tangible control over either feeding or starving one's defilements, and sufficiently doing the latter is what unlocks the possibility for understanding to arise no matter how weak one's faculties were at the start.

[140]Note that perception (*saññā)* does not refer only to primitive sense objects like visual shapes, colors, and sounds. Even the most elaborate philosophical or scientific concepts and explanations are perceptions. And often, explanations of the way experience supposedly works—such as it's being a sequence of infinitesimal "mind-moments", or a stream of interlinked cause-and-effect processes—are confused with understanding. No matter how vivid they become with the help of a concentration technique, these are also just perceptions, and are thus of no more intrinsic value than the sight of a leaf or the sound of a bird. That which is truly supramundane—the knowledge of *any and all* perceptions as impermanent, suffering, and not-self—is a peripheral, contextual recognition that manifests *simultaneously* with the mundane, ordinary content of perceptions, on a structurally different level. If that's understood, chasing after specific perceptions—the entire goal of most modern meditative practices—is seen as futile and misguided. The goal becomes to fortify the right knowledge in regard to the perceptions you encounter in everyday life, since that's where defilements and suffering arise to begin with.

[141]The fact that you get exactly what you put in—no more, no less—is a cause for delight. The fact that nothing can fortuitously enlighten you also means that nothing can fortuitously hold you back.

[142]Almost all of us today belong to the latter, since even after receiving manifold times more information on the Dhamma than probably many Arahants had back then, we're still hardly any closer to understanding it.

"But friend, might there be another explanation for how a noble disciple is one of right and straight view …?"

"There might, friends. A noble disciple understands ignorance, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation … But what is ignorance? What is its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation? Not knowing suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering. This is called ignorance. ******Ignorance comes with defilements. Ignorance ceases when defilements cease.****** *The practice that leads to the cessation of ignorance is simply this Noble Eightfold Path …"*
—MN 9

In fact, though it's commonplace to assume that passion, aversion, and distraction are a primary concern only for a *sotāpanna* who's attempting to break the next two fetters and achieve non-return, the Buddha says otherwise:

…But take a learned noble disciple who has seen the noble ones, and is skilled and trained in the teaching of the noble ones. He's seen true persons, and is skilled and trained in the teaching of the true persons. He understands what things are fit for attention and what things are unfit for attention. So he attends to things fit for attention and not to things unfit for attention.

And what are the things unfit for attention that he doesn't attend to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen influx of sensuality arises in him, or the arisen influx of sensuality increases, the unarisen influx of being arises in him, or the arisen influx of being increases, the unarisen influx of ignorance arises in him, or the arisen influx of ignorance increases. These are the things unfit for attention that he doesn't attend to.

And what are the things fit for attention that he attends to? They are things such that when he attends to them, the unarisen influx of sensuality does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of sensuality is given up, the unarisen influx of being does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of being is given up, the unarisen influx of ignorance does not arise in him, and the arisen influx of ignorance is given up. These are the things fit for attention that he attends to.

Because of not attending to things unfit for attention and attending to things fit for attention, unarisen influxes don't arise and arisen influxes are given up.

They attend through-the-origin: 'This is suffering' … 'This is the origin of suffering' … 'This is the cessation of suffering' … 'This is the practice that leads to the cessation of suffering'. And as they do so, three fetters are given up: personality-view, doubt, and the grasping at virtue-and-duty. These are called the influxes that should be given up by seeing.
—MN 2

And what are the defilements of the mind? Longing and immoral greed, ill will, anger, resentment, denigration, contentiousness, jealousy, stinginess, deceit, deviousness, obstinacy, insolence, conceit, arrogance, indulgence, and carelessness are defilements of the mind.

A bhikkhu who understands that longing and immoral greed are defilements of the mind gives them up. A bhikkhu who understands that ill will … carelessness is a defilement of the mind gives it up.

Once he has understood these defilements of the mind for what they are, and has given them up, he has absolute confidence in the Buddha: 'That Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.'[143]

He has absolute confidence in the Dhamma: 'The Dhamma is well explained by the Buddha—presently evident, not involving time, verifiable, and goading-on, to be experienced by sensible people for themselves.'

He has absolute confidence in the Saṅgha: 'The Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples is practicing rightly and straightly, practicing the way, the proper course. It consists of the four pairs of people, the eight

[143] As pointed out further below, this absolute confidence (*aveccappasāda)* in the Triple Gem is one of the core attributes of a stream-enterer.

individuals. This is the Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples that is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of donation, worthy of greeting with joined palms, and is the supreme field of merit for the world.'

When a bhikkhu has discarded, eliminated, released, given up, and relinquished to this extent, thinking, 'I have absolute confidence in the Buddha … the Dhamma … the Saṅgha,' he realizes the Dhamma and its meaning, and gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. Thinking: 'I have discarded, eliminated, released, given up, and relinquished to this extent,' he realizes the Dhamma and its meaning, and gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he's glad, joy is born. When the mind is joyous, the body becomes calm. When the body is calm, he feels comfort. When he's comfortable, the mind becomes composed. —MN 7

These descriptions correspond to the Sequential Training so often described in the Suttas, which is the course of practice that tames the mind such that it can see clearly. [144]This taming is not achieved through the repetitive performance of any specific practice or observance: you need to know, on a per-case basis, that your present effort and way of attending to things leads to the non-arising and decrease of sensuality, being, and ignorance.[145] The "method" is self-questioning of any and all of your intentions, including the intention to make the practice methodical and structured.

It's of paramount importance not to leave any gaps in your attempts to purify the mind from unwholesome actions and mental states. It's easy to fall into the attitude of trying to give up only the things that you suppose to be categorical obstacles to stream-entry—usually a gross underestimation—and assuming that anything more is a plus but not essential, and this is a grave mistake.

Firstly, you don't know in advance how far *you* need to take the training for your mind to be sufficiently ripe for the Right View to take root.[146] You don't know to what extent something is obstructing *you* until you've already successfully abandoned it. Secondly, an individual who becomes a *sotāpanna* is still subject to the rest of the fetters not because they deliberately allowed them to stay, but because they resolved to give up all defilements they were aware of, and yet succeeded only partially. You're not getting any closer to seeing that craving is the root of suffering if you still knowingly tolerate it. That attitude in itself would be an impediment, even if externally the actions you perform through it are still in line with the precepts and are not that significant.

Focusing on wearing away the defilements, which will always obstruct an accurate perspective of your experience no matter how earnestly you try to investigate it, ensures that you will create as much space as possible for the full Right View to fit, instead of minimizing the Right View so that it fits in within the space you currently have. You will simply do the work, and whenever enough work has been done[147], if you have enough learning and familiarity with what needs to be understood, understanding will *have to* arise:

"Bhikkhus, a farmer has three urgent duties. What three? A farmer swiftly makes sure the field is well ploughed and tilled. Next they swiftly plant seeds in season. When the time is right, they swiftly irrigate or drain the field. These are the three urgent duties of a farmer. That farmer has no special power or ability to say: 'Let the crops germinate today! Let them flower tomorrow! Let them ripen the day after!' But there comes a time when that farmer's crops germinate, flower, and ripen as the seasons change.

[144]One's own actions and habits are what clouds the mind and obstructs discernment; the mind doesn't get clouded accidentally due to lack of skill in meditation. Meditation cannot be practiced properly until one understands this, and contemporary approaches to meditation by and large revolve around repetitively performing practices that one is *told* will lead to the decrease of defilements. But the connection is not immediately apparent beyond the fact that the attention that's put into the concentration practice is attention that won't drift into coarse unwholesome directions. But not paying attention to something for the time being is not the same as giving it up. What's more, even if sensuality can be temporarily held in check in this way, in the case of being (*bhava*) and ignorance, it's not that simple.

[145]The only part that you can "just do" is the precepts. Pretty much everything beyond that won't go in the right direction unless its accompanied by knowledge of what needs to be abandoned, and how to go about that the right way.

[146]As an example, the fact that there are stories of attained lay disciples in the Suttas who only kept the five precepts does not mean that just that will be enough *for you*. Due to the fact that not everyone has the same faculties, you cannot assume yourself to be in the same internal position as somebody else due to an overlap between your external lifestyles (and compared to those laypeople, in many ways there would still be more differences than similarities). This is explained in detail in AN 10.75.

[147]How much time will be required cannot be known in advance, since you cannot know the extent of your own ignorance—you don't know how much you don't know.

In the same way, a bhikkhu has three urgent duties. What three? Undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom. These are the three urgent duties of a bhikkhu. That bhikkhu has no special power or ability to say: 'Let my mind be liberated from the influxes through non-assumption today! Or tomorrow! Or the day after!' But there comes a time—as that bhikkhu trains in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom—that their mind is liberated from the influxes through non-assumption.

So you should train like this: 'We will have keen interest in undertaking the training in the higher virtue, the higher mind, and the higher wisdom.' That's how you should train."
—AN 3.92

> *Suppose there was a hen with eight or ten or twelve eggs. And she properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated. Even if that hen doesn't wish: 'If only my chicks could break out of the eggshell with their claws and beak and hatch safely!' Still they can break out and hatch safely. Why is that? Because that chicken with eight or ten or twelve eggs properly sat on them to keep them warm and incubated.*
>
> *In the same way, even though a bhikkhu who is committed to development might not wish: 'If only my mind was liberated from the influxes through non-assumption!' Even so, his mind is liberated from the influxes through non-assumption. Why is that? You should say: 'Because of development'. Development in what? Development in the four establishments of recollection, the four right efforts, the four bases of spiritual ability, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven awakening factors, and the noble eightfold path.*
> *—SN 22.101*

In fact, it's useful to consider that the modern way of thinking about different stages of awakening was very likely not in place in the Buddha's time, and the strict categorizations and lists found in the texts are likely to be a result of compilation of things originally said in various discourses, rather than of the Buddha actually telling people that they don't need to worry about certain defilements and forms of craving until later on, which is clearly counterproductive. This means that for most individuals who became *sotāpannas*, the aim was to tame their minds and free themselves from suffering in the broadest sense.

Right Practice Begins with Right View People generally don't take into account the fact that their present understanding of the Dhamma and practice *is* what stands in the way of their attainment of the Right View. There is a tendency to assume that if one just practices in line with one's current understanding, eventually there will arise some sort of experience, vision, or insight that will lend experiential confirmation—read: novel perceptions—to what one knew "only intellectually", thus entering the stream. Meanwhile, one's standpoints, assumptions, and understanding of the path have changed very little, if at all.

In reality, the knowledge of the right way of practice *is* what is acquired at stream-entry, and thus, to the extent you assume that you already understand the practice, you obstruct the possibility of ceasing to be a *puthujjana*. The term "stream" refers to none other than the noble eightfold path, and it is only from stream-entry onwards that one has access to it, which is only natural given that all its factors hinge fully on Right View[148]:

> *Sāriputta, they speak of 'the stream'. What is the stream?"*
>
> *"Bhante, the stream is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, and right composure."*

[148]The "textbook", mundane definition of things like right speech and right action are particular modes of behavior that can be emulated by any complete beginner (abstinence from false or harsh speech, not killing, etc.) But someone who speaks in the most gentle and amicable way and would not kill a fly even if their life depended on it, yet has an inaccurate view of craving, and thus assumes that it's not found in them when they speak and act kindly when in fact it is, has wrong speech and wrong action in the ultimate sense. "Wrong" not because it's reprehensible or immoral, but simply because it doesn't lead to liberation. On the other hand, the *right* abstinence from harsh speech and killing, which may look the same externally, naturally follows from the right understanding of craving of a noble disciple, and thus it *does* lead to the final destruction of craving. The factors of the noble eightfold path are defined by what they are founded upon and lead to, not solely by how they are described. If that weren't the case, following it would be a trivial matter.

"Good, good, Sāriputta! For the stream is simply this noble eightfold path, that is: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, and right composure.

Sāriputta, they speak of 'a stream-enterer'. What is a stream-enterer?"

"Bhante, anyone who possesses this noble eightfold path is called a stream-enterer, the venerable of such and such name and clan."

"Good, good, Sāriputta! For ******the one who possesses this noble eightfold path is called a stream-enterer,******* the venerable of such and such name and clan."*
—SN 55.5

"Bhikkhus, someone with five qualities is unable to enter the sure path in regard to beneficial qualities even when listening to the true teaching. What five? They discredit the talk, the speaker, or themselves. They're witless, dull, and stupid. ******They think they understand what they don't understand.******
—AN 5.15

There is an additional, often overlooked dimension to the Right View beyond simply agreeing with the Dhamma intellectually or even experientially, and that is the fact that your *interpretation* and *viewing* of the Dhamma inevitably starts out not being in line with what the Buddha was trying to convey. The terms "suffering" and "craving", for example, are interpreted either overly vaguely or flat-out wrongly by a *puthujjana*, and so even though they may wholeheartedly agree with the statement "craving is the origin of suffering", for them, it doesn't *mean* what it should.

Rectifying your understanding so that *for you* the Four Noble Truths (or any other teaching in the Suttas) mean what the Buddha intended is how you come to "understand them as they really are", and so it could be said that a *sotāpanna* is one who not only agrees with the teaching outwardly, but also interprets it internally as it was meant to be understood.[149]

But this is not the direction where understanding is usually sought. Overlooking that the very interpretations and assumptions they approach the practice with are where their ignorance and wrong view lies, people often set out to gain novel experiences, releases, and insights that take those root misunderstandings and wrong emphases for granted, and which only serve to cement them further.[150]

Many practitioners, if asked directly, will readily admit that they still don't have the Right View. But even if that's what they *say*, internally they may be practicing *as if* they already understand the path, and it's just a matter of time until they become enlightened. However "advanced" and knowledgeable such a person becomes, they will still be within wrong view because they never acknowledged that as their starting point and strove to go beyond it. It's like someone who keeps building higher and higher, but *in the wrong spot*:

"Bhikkhus, ignorance is foremost in leading to detrimental things, with lack of prudence and dread [of wrongdoing] following right behind. For an ignorant person, sunk in ignorance, wrong view arises. For one of wrong view, wrong intention arises. For one of wrong intention, wrong speech arises. For one of wrong speech, wrong action arises. For one of wrong action, wrong speech arises. For one of wrong speech, wrong livelihood arises. For one of wrong livelihood, wrong effort arises. For one of wrong effort, wrong recollection arises. For one of wrong recollection, wrong composure arises. ******For one of wrong composure, wrong knowledge arises. For one of wrong knowledge, wrong liberation arises.******

Knowledge is foremost in leading to beneficial things, with prudence and dread [of wrongdoing] following right behind. For a wise person, one attained to knowledge, right view arises. For one of right view, right

[149] And the measure for that alignment is no longer being liable to suffering. Not because you are now skilled at circumventing or ameliorating it *with* the Dhamma, but because you're simply not touched by displeasure in the first place even when it arises.

[150] One of the most common and unspoken misinterpretations we all start with is that craving is given up when the objects that induce it are no longer present in the mind. This happens to be the tacit view behind all meditation techniques regardless of their particular differences—which makes their approachability unsurprising—and it puts both the problem and its solution on the level of *what* is being experienced, instead of taking responsibility for one's own craving regardless of what's being experienced. The problem is, in this view, not that your dog is untrained and misbehaves in certain situations, but that those situations *occur*. As a matter of course, Nibbāna is then misconceived as some sort of altered state where the contents of experience are entirely different (or have vanished altogether), rather than as the cessation of passion, craving, being, ownership, and anxiety in the face of whatever is experienced.

intention arises. For one of right intention, right speech arises. For one of right speech, right action arises. For one of right action, right speech arises. For one of right speech, right livelihood arises. For one of right livelihood, right effort arises. For one of right effort, right recollection arises.For one of right recollection, right composure arises. For one of right composure, right knowledge arises. For one of right knowledge, right liberation arises."
—AN 10.105

"Bhikkhus, I will teach you the inferior person and the one who is worse than the inferior person. I will teach you the superior person and the one who is better than the superior person. Listen to that….

"And what, bhikkhus, is the inferior person? Here someone is of wrong view … wrong composure. This is called the inferior person.

"And what, bhikkhus, is the one who is worse than the inferior person? Here someone is of wrong view … ******wrong composure*******,* ******wrong knowledge, wrong liberation. This is called the one who is worse than the inferior person.******[151]

"And what, bhikkhus, is the superior person? Here someone is of right view … right composure. This is called the superior person.

"And what, bhikkhus, is the one who is better than the superior person? Here someone is of right view … right composure, right knowledge, right liberation. This is called the one who is better than the superior person."
—SN 45.26.

Prior to the Right View, instead of your practice consisting of cultivating what you currently think or were told mindfulness is, for example, it should revolve around questioning and revising your interpretation of what mindfulness is. Unless you're already a *sotāpanna*, you need to be ready to scrap *all* of your assumptions about the Dhamma, down to the most basic and elemental, and start from square one as many times as it takes. And this is not just a theoretical affair: it's a *training* too,[152] just not the one most people necessarily want to do even though it's the one they really need.

It's exactly like someone who's totally new to a specific sport. Their training regimen cannot be the same as an elite athlete of that discipline, whose goal is to jump as high as possible, run as fast as possible or as long as possible, or defeat the best players in the world. They would have to dedicate most of their time to building a foundation by doing comparatively unexciting mobility drills, taking technique lessons, and building their overall fitness before they can shift their focus onto winning championships or breaking world records. Prioritizing performance would at that point actively prevent them from perfecting the fundamentals, reinforce incorrect habits or movement patterns that may be harder to undo later, and easily result in injury.

The *sotāpanna* or higher is one who has acquired the fundamentals—the four noble truths, the five faculties/powers, the seven awakening factors, the noble eightfold path, etc.—by understanding them. Thus, they can from then onwards focus on the further *development* of those fundamentals. That's why they're called a *trainee (sekha):*

"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or thought has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.

"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development.

[151] This highlights how the fact that something makes one feel more calm, peaceful, or even wise as a *puthujjana* does not automatically mean it's right, and thus it should be taken with a grain of salt even then.

[152] Such rectification of views can only take place on the basis of purification of mind, which is in turn enabled by virtue and restraint, i.e. not engaging in greedy, averse, or distracting actions by body, speech, or mind throughout your daily life. There is next to no intrinsic overlap between this and becoming skilled in concentration techniques, conventionally regarded as the means for mental purification.

And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or thought has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.

And what, bhikkhus, is the power of development? In this context, ******the power of development is the power of the trainees.******* For******* relying on the power of a trainee*******, one gives up passion, aversion, and muddledness.[153] Having given up passion, aversion, and muddledness, one does not do anything detrimental; one does not engage in anything harmful. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers."*

"There are, bhikkhus, these two powers. What two? The power of reflection and the power of development. And what, bhikkhus, is the power of reflection? It's when someone reflects: 'Misconduct of body, speech, or mind has a bad result both right in the present experience and in the future.' Reflecting like this, they give up misconduct by way of body, speech, and thought, and develop good conduct by way of body, speech, and thought, keeping themselves pure. This is called the power of reflection.

And what, bhikkhus, is the power of development? It's when a bhikkhu develops the awakening factors of recollection, discernment of phenomena, effort, joy, calm, composure, and equanimity, which rely on withdrawal, dispassion, and cessation, and ripen in relinquishment. This is called the power of development. These are the two powers."[154]
—AN 2.11-12

Don't Neglect Faith

Another important aspect that is often overlooked is the group of traits most often attributed to *sotāpannas* in the Suttas. It's not a transcendental "fruition experience" or a mystical "taste of Nibbāna" that they got one fateful evening. It's four factors that, though they sound less glamorous, are immeasurably more important to achieving the goal of freedom from suffering:

"So, Ānanda, I will teach you the explanation of the Dhamma called 'the mirror of the teaching'. A noble disciple who has this may declare of themselves: 'I've finished with rebirth in hell, the animal realm, and the ghost realm. I've finished with all places of loss, bad places, the underworld. I am a stream-enterer! I'm not liable to be reborn in the underworld, and am bound for awakening.'

And what is that mirror of the teaching?

Here, the noble disciple possesses absolute confidence in the Buddha thus: 'That Blessed One is an Arahant, a fully awakened Buddha, accomplished in knowledge and conduct, holy, knower of the world, supreme guide for those who wish to train, teacher of gods and humans, awakened, blessed.'

He possesses absolute confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'The Dhamma is well explained by the Blessed One—presently evident, not involving time, verifiable, and goading-on, to be experienced by sensible people for themselves.'

He possesses absolute confidence in the Saṅgha thus: 'The Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples is practicing rightly and straightly, practicing the way, the proper course. It consists of the four pairs of people, the eight individuals. This is the Saṅgha of the Buddha's disciples that is worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of donation, worthy of greeting with joined palms, and is the supreme field of merit for the world.'

He possesses the virtues dear to the noble ones—unbroken, untorn, unblemished, unmottled, liberating, praised by the wise, not clung to, and conducive to composure.

[153] A trainee is defined as one who understands these roots of the unwholesome, and that's precisely why they're in the position to abandon them. A *puthujjana* has a very limited ability to recognize greed as greed, aversion as aversion, and delusion as delusion, and so if they never strive to upgrade their criteria for what constitutes a defilement, they will continue being driven by them unwittingly.

[154] See SN 47.30, which states that the awakening factors are *acquired* by the *sotāpanna*, whereas its often assumed that a *puthujjana* would become a *sotāpanna* by developing those factors. The same applies for all other wings to awakening: the five faculties are only present in noble ones (SN 48.12), the noble eightfold path begins with stream-entry as quoted above, and the four foundations of mindfulness hinge on not just purified virtue but also right view (SN 47.3).

This is that mirror of the teaching."
—DN 16

The purpose of faith, trust, or confidence is purely pragmatic, and it shouldn't be confused with blind piety, loyalty, or religious zeal, which are all on the side of clinging to virtue-and-duty (*sīlabbatapārāmāsa*).

Its function is to put you in a position of readiness to question and revise your actions, views, and assumptions to align them with the Buddha's teaching further, never assuming that they're already aligned enough. A defining quality of the right kind of faith is that it's not just a matter of principle: it pushes you to be diligent and make effort to achieve a goal, and not just to take on this or that theoretical view.

This is how progress comes about even for a *sotāpanna*[155], and it's why *saddhā* is the first of the five faculties: it's what allows one to go "against the grain" as much as is actually required, instead of only to the degree that's convenient, not too unpleasant, or simply assumed to be necessary by underestimation. Wisdom, understanding, or intuition cannot be relied on at the expense of faith, especially until one is fully free from ignorance, since it can and very often will be biased by craving—a parasite that always finds the most inconspicuous of ways to linger.

Therefore, given how there is often a tendency to put all the emphasis on wisdom, it's important to recognize that it doesn't matter what deep insights your practice seems to be giving rise to if it's not also resulting in this type of grounded, unshakable confidence in the Triple Gem. If so, it's not actually leading you to stream-entry, because the right faith and the right understanding are totally inseparable.

A *puthujjana* does not have this level of faith, and fabricating it should not be the goal, as that would just result in blind and hollow conviction. Rather, it's a natural and necessary byproduct of comprehending the Four Noble Truths that there is no room for doubt regarding the one who discovered them, his teaching, and others who one can see have also rightly understood it for themselves. This is why the Right View is the ultimate guarantee of harmony in a community. Less-than-unshakable faith should thus be taken as an *indirect* sign that the Four Noble Truths have not really been understood.

A form of faith that a *puthujjana* can and should implement is to operate perpetually with the context that what they think is in line with the Dhamma may well ultimately not be, no matter how much sense it makes, and that there are those who know better and whose advice is worth taking to heart even when it goes against the grain of their preferences. This is what would allow them to take the often-unpleasant process of abandoning their cherished wrong views to the extent necessary to arrive at the Dhamma:

> "*Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has not given up five obstinacies and cut off five shackles of mind,* ******it's not possible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching-and-discipline.******
>
> *What are the five obstinacies he hasn't given up? Firstly, a bhikkhu has doubts about the Teacher. He's uncertain, undecided, and lacking confidence. This being so, his mind doesn't incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the first obstinacy he hasn't given up.*
>
> *Furthermore, a bhikkhu has doubts about the Dhamma … This is the second obstinacy.*
>
> *He has doubts about the Saṅgha … This is the third obstinacy.*
>
> *He has doubts about the training … This is the fourth obstinacy.*
>
> *Furthermore, a bhikkhu is angry and upset with his fellow renunciates, resentful, and obstinate. This being so, his mind doesn't incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the fifth obstinacy he hasn't given up. These are the five obstinacies he hasn't given up.*
> *—MN 16*
>
> "*For a disciple who has faith in the Teacher's message and lives to penetrate it, what accords with the Dhamma is this: 'The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple. He is the one who knows, not I.'*
> *—MN 70*

[155] See AN 6.65, where a lack of faith is one of the things obstructing the attainment of non-return.

"It was, and is, my attitude towards the Suttas that, if I find anything in them that is against my own view, they are right, and I am wrong."
—Ven. Ñāṇavīra Thera

*"Bhikkhus, I say that attention from the origin (yoniso manasikāra) has a nutriment; it's not without a nutriment. And what is the nutriment for attention through the origin? '*******Faith'*******, it should be said."*[156]
—AN 10.61

"There are two conditions for the arising of right view: the words of another and ******attending from the origin (yoniso manasikāra).****** *These are the two conditions for the arising of right view."*
—MN 43

Just as with a physical illness, the necessary condition for faith in the context of the Dhamma is the honest recognition of the peril that you find yourself in—not knowing the way out of suffering. If you're not too bothered by the idea of remaining where you are now, there is no basis for faith:

"I say, bhikkhus, that faith too has a proximate cause; it does not lack a proximate cause. And what is the proximate cause for faith? It should be said: suffering.
—SN 12.23

"And what is the result of suffering? There are some cases in which a person overpowered by suffering, overcome with suffering, grieves, sorrows, laments, beats his breast, and becomes bewildered. Or one overpowerd by suffering, overcome with suffering, comes to search outside, 'Who knows a way or two to the cessation of this pain?' I tell you, bhikkhus, that suffering results either in bewilderment or in search. This is called the result of suffering.
—AN 6.63

Thus, the sense of urgency to "cure" oneself is the requisite condition for faith, which is the requisite condition for applying the treatment to the extent necessary.

Contrary to many mainstream views, there is no room for contentment or satisfaction with one's situation for as long as one isn't at least a *sotāpanna*[157]. In fact, the Buddha frequently urged even noble disciples who *do* understand the escape from suffering not to become satisfied. What then can be said of a *puthujjana*, who isn't just vulnerable to suffering to a much greater degree, but also doesn't understand the way out of that predicament?

"Bhikkhus, if one's clothes or head were ablaze, what should be done about it?"

"Bhante, if one's clothes or head were ablaze, one should arouse the utmost desire, effort, perseverance, unremitting exertion, and recollection-and-awareness to extinguish them.

"Bhikkhus, when the Four Noble Truths have not been comprehended—looking on equanimously even at one's blazing clothes or head, not paying attention to them—one should arouse the utmost desire, effort, perseverance, unremitting exertion, and recollection-and-awareness to comprehend them as they are. What four? The noble truth of suffering … the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.'… An exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' "
—SN 56.34

"Bhikkhus, suppose there was a man with a lifespan of a hundred years. And someone might say to him: 'Come now, my good man, they'll strike you with a hundred spears in the morning, at midday, and in the late afternoon. And you'll live for a hundred years being struck with three hundred spears every day. But when a hundred years have passed, you will comprehend the four noble truths you don't yet comprehend.'

[156] You can't see, let alone address the problem at its origin, womb, or core (*yoni)* if you don't have faith/trust in the instruction to dig and question further than your own intuition inclines you to.

[157] Contentment regarding material things is beneficial and should be fostered; satisfaction with one's internal development is what should not be tolerated.

For a clansman intent on [his own] benefit, this is sufficient reason to submit.

Why is that? Wandering-on (saṃsāra) has no known beginning. No first point is found of blows by spears, swords, arrows, and axes. But even though this may be so, the comprehension of the four noble truths doesn't come with pain or sadness, I say. Rather, the comprehension of the four noble truths comes only with comfort and happiness, I say. What four? The noble truths of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path.

"Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: 'This is suffering.'… An exertion should be made to understand: 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.' "
—SN 56.35

"Bhikkhus, suppose the Himalayas, the king of mountains, was worn away and eroded except for seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds.

What do you think, bhikkhus? Which is more: the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been worn away and eroded, or the seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds that are left?"

"Bhante, the portion of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, that has been worn away and eroded is certainly more. The seven pebbles the size of mustard seeds are tiny. Compared to the Himalayas, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part."

"In the same way, for a noble disciple accomplished in view, an individual with comprehension, the suffering that's over and done with is more, what's left is tiny. Compared to the mass of suffering in the past that's over and done with, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part, since there are at most seven more lives. That's how very beneficial it is to comprehend the Dhamma and to gain the Dhamma-eye."
—SN 13.10

"Bhikkhus, suppose a man was to place down on Sineru, the king of mountains, seven pebbles the size of mung beans.

What do you think, bhikkhus? Which is more: the seven pebbles the size of mung beans, or Sineru, the king of mountains?"

"Bhante, Sineru, the king of mountains, is certainly more. The seven pebbles the size of mung beans are tiny. Compared to Sineru, it's not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part."

"In the same way, compared with the achievements of a noble disciple accomplished in view, the achievements of the ascetics, brahmins, and wanderers of other religions is not nearly a hundredth, a thousandth, or a hundred thousandth part. So great is the achievement of the person accomplished in view, so great is their comprehension."
—SN 13.11

"Bhikkhus, I have gotten to know two qualities: discontent with regard to beneficial qualities, and unrelenting exertion. Relentlessly I exerted myself, (thinking,) 'Gladly would I let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be attained through manly fortitude, manly effort, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my effort.' From this heedfulness of mine was awakening attained. From this heedfulness of mine was the unsurpassed safety from bondage.

"You, too, monks, should relentlessly exert yourselves, (thinking,) 'Gladly would I let the flesh and blood in my body dry up, leaving just the skin, tendons, and bones, but if I have not attained what can be attained through manly fortitude, manly effort, manly striving, there will be no relaxing my effort.' You, too, will soon abide having comprehended, realized, and entered upon for yourself, right in the present experience, the supreme goal of the renunciate life for which clansmen rightly go forth from the lay life into homelessness.'
—SN 2.5

Not based on laxity,

not based on little fortitude,

is this Nibbāna attainable—

the liberation from all suffering.
—SN 21.4

Stepwise Training

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

The training of the mind fundamentally boils down to restraining and abandoning what's unwholesome (greed, aversion, delusion) and cultivating and maintaining what's wholesome (non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion). In an ideal scenario, these instructions would suffice to take an individual all the way to Arahantship. But the reality is that we start out not being able to tell with certainty what's wholesome or unwholesome in our own minds. There is bound to be a great deal of confusion when trying to make that distinction, which is why the idea of a method, technique, or observance that bypasses the toil required to gain such clarity—something that you can safely assume to be wholesome without needing to understand for yourself *why* it is so—is quite appealing.

What the Buddha devised to address this was nothing along the lines of a modern meditation technique, which solves the problem by turning a blind eye to it, but rather the "Stepwise Training" (*anupubbasikkhā).* This is the closest thing to a methodical practice that he taught:

> *" 'Master Gotama, in this stilt longhouse we can see sequential progress down to the last step of the staircase. Among the brahmins we can see sequential progress in learning the chants. Among archers we can see sequential progress in archery. Among us accountants, who earn a living by accounting, we can see sequential progress in calculation. For when we get an apprentice we first make them count: 'One one, two twos, three threes, four fours, five fives, six sixes, seven sevens, eight eights, nine nines, ten tens.' We even make them count up to a hundred. Is it possible to similarly describe a sequential training, sequential progress, and sequential practice in this teaching and discipline?'*
>
> *'It is possible, brahmin. Suppose a deft horse trainer were to obtain a fine thoroughbred. First of all, he'd make it get used to wearing the bit. In the same way, when the Realized One gets a man for training, he first guides him like this: 'Come, bhikkhu, live fulfilling virtue and the training rules. Live restrained by the code of conduct, endowed with proper behavior and a suitable environment. Seeing danger in the slightest fault, train in the training rules…'*
>
> *When the bhikkhu is virtuous, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, guard your sense doors…'*
>
> *When the bhikkhu has his sense doors guarded, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be moderate in eating…'*
>
> *When the bhikkhu eats in moderation, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be committed to vigilance…'*
>
> *When the bhikkhu is committed to vigilance, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, be possessed of recollection-and-awareness…'*
>
> *When the bhikkhu is possessed of recollection-and-awareness, the Realized One guides him further: 'Come, bhikkhu, frequent a secluded lodging—a wilderness, the root of a tree, a hill, a ravine, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a forest, the open air, a heap of straw…'*
>
> *He gives up these five hindrances, defilements of the mind that weaken understanding. Then, quite disjoined from sensuality, disjoined from unwholesome phenomena, with thinking and with pondering, with joy and comfort born of separation, he abides having entered upon the first jhāna… second jhāna… third jhāna… fourth jhāna…*
>
> That's how I instruct the bhikkhus who are trainees—who haven't achieved their goal, but live aspiring to the supreme safety from the yoke.'"

—MN 107

If a beginner is told to purify their mind from the five hindrances—which is often all the detail the Suttas give, and not by accident—they will not succeed, no matter how much theoretical information they are given about what the hindrances are. Like a blind person needing to be told in what direction to walk, the most they could do is try to follow a directive that they can only *assume* or *infer*—based on tradition, hearsay, or logic—will get rid of those very subtle forms of unwholesomeness, such as keeping their attention on a meditation object, repeating a mantra, or contemplating a certain idea. They would only be able to gauge success through secondary criteria, such as what they experience and how they feel, and not through a direct discernment of whether the hindrances are still present. They cannot see the hindrances *in their own right*, as things that they can either choose to engage with or not, and because of that, there is no way that they can truly abandon them.[158] This is why presenting meditation as the *gateway* to Buddhism, as is usually done, is such a grave mistake. In reality, the meditation the Buddha taught represents the most refined stage of the training, and many Suttas go as far as stating that only attained individuals are in a position to rightly develop it. [159],[160]

But what even the most uninitiated individual can recognize as a choice they're responsible for—and thus can abstain from—is the breaking of the precepts: coarse, visible actions of body and speech. This is why the training starts there. They would likely still encounter doubts and confusion at certain times when striving to keep the precepts, but their discernment of what is wholesome and unwholesome will not be *that* far below what's required for the task: purifying their virtue is a realistic goal given their current position.

Once their virtue is purified,[161] their discernment of *kusala* and *akusala* will have been refined, making sense restraint the next, slightly loftier goal in the same line of development. Since it involves the same principle that underpins virtue but on a subtler level, they would now have some ability to discern the motivation behind their looking, listening, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, i.e., whether it's greed or non-greed, aversion or non-aversion, or distraction or non-distraction. That internal clarity is what would guide their efforts, so a static, externally-prescribed observance of *always* avoiding specific sights, sounds, etc., in the name of sense restraint—which would only ignore and further obscure the whole dimension of intentionality—would be redundant.

In this way, a person would gradually become more familiar with their own mind, which is the prerequisite for attaining the Right View: the understanding of what's wholesome and unwholesome that goes to the very root, leaving nothing out, and leads to the complete destruction of suffering when recollected and followed.

With that understanding in place, the only right meditation—the one that is not driven by nor further fuels any unseen defilements, and thus cannot be encapsulated by any form of static and methodical instruction[162]—becomes possible.

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[158] At best, they can "suppress" them, which is another way of saying "giving up on the actual task and shifting attention elsewhere". It's no coincidence that meditation is commonly viewed as the means to "suppress" the hindrances.

[159] In fact, there is no record of the Buddha teaching any sort of meditation to lay people unless they were at least *sotāpanna*s, and mindfulness of breathing—counterfeit versions of which are nowadays more widespread than even the most basic tenets of Buddhism, such as virtue, renunciation, and relinquishment—never appears in a discourse where householders are said to be present.

[160] Since each stage of the training builds upon the discernment and fortitude of mind developed by all the previous ones, it is categorically impossible for a person to succeed in meditation (the cleansing of the hindrances) without succeeding in virtue, sense restraint, etc. The fact that this often *does* seem to happen in many modern traditions that see meditation as essential and everything else as a helpful but ultimately optional accessory speaks to how severely they diverge from what the Buddha actually taught. It clearly should be the other way around if we go by the Suttas: virtue, restraint, and a degree of renunciation are not negotiable, while "formal" meditation enters the picture only for the few who are dedicated enough to have fulfilled its prerequisites: monastics, or laypeople who live as such. And even then, unless they have the Right View, their task would be to *understand* what it is that should be developed in meditation, and not to meditate per se.

[161] As is often mentioned in the Suttas, this doesn't mean keeping the precepts by the letter and nothing more. One needs to live "seeing the danger in the slightest fault," which means that one's virtue needs to encompass actions of body and speech—even of mind, to an extent—that may not be strictly against the precepts, but can be seen to be rooted in greed, aversion, or distraction.

[162] Which is why there aren't any in the Suttas. Not due to a slip on anyone's part, nor because there wasn't the intellectual sophistication required to invent such descriptions in those days.

Stream-Entry Requires Celibacy

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

The Five Hindrances

> "Bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has not given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his weak and feeble understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is not possible.
>
> Bhikkhus, suppose there was a far-reaching mountain stream with a fast current, with much carrying power. Then a man would open irrigation channels on both banks. Thus, bhikkhus, the current in the middle of the river would be scattered, dispersed, and divided. It would not be far-reaching, have a fast current, or have much carrying power.
>
> In just this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has not given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his weak and feeble understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is not possible.
>
> But, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his powerful understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is possible.
>
> Bhikkhus, suppose there was a far-reaching mountain stream with a fast current, with much carrying power. Then a man would close the irrigation channels on both banks. Thus, bhikkhus, the current in the middle of the river would not be scattered, dispersed, and divided. It would be far-reaching, have a fast current, and have much carrying power.
>
> In just this way, bhikkhus, that a bhikkhu who has given up these five obstructions, hindrances that invade the mind and weaken understanding, would, with his powerful understanding, know what is for his own benefit, for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of both, or realize a superhuman distinction amounting to the knowledge and vision of a noble one—that is possible."
>
> —AN 5.51

It is common knowledge that to understand the Dhamma, one needs to be free from the five hindrances. But because of prevalent misconceptions about what the hindrances are, it is not so common to see that this freedom cannot take place for one who is not celibate.

The hindrances are not momentary disturbances that one can overcome simply by shifting attention away from them. They are the framework through which an untamed mind experiences the entire world constantly, including the past and the future.

So, no matter where your attention goes, you are under the hindrance of sensuality if you currently *would* become elated at the offer of sensual pleasure. It does not matter if no sensual pleasures present themselves in reality; the framework of lust, ill will, laziness, etc., is already weighing down on you *now*, influencing your choices and the way you attend to things, if *now* those mental states *could* flare up.

The similes the Buddha used to describe the hindrances should be enough to realize that they don't work the way most people think:

> Suppose a man who had gotten into debt applied himself to work, and his efforts proved successful. He would pay off the original loan and have enough left over to support his wife. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.

> Suppose a man was sick, suffering, and gravely ill. He would lose his appetite and get physically weak. But after some time, he would recover from that illness, and regain his appetite and his strength. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man was imprisoned in a jail. But after some time, he was released from jail, safe and sound, with no loss of wealth. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man was a bondservant. He would not be his own master, but be indentured to another, unable to go where he wishes. But after some time, he would be freed from servitude. He would be his own master, not indentured to another, an emancipated individual able to go where he wishes. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> Suppose a man with wealth and property was traveling along a perilous desert road, with nothing to eat. But after some time, he crossed over the desert safely, arriving within a safe village free of peril. Thinking about this, he would be filled with joy and happiness.
>
> In the same way, the bhikkhu regards these five hindrances that are not given up in him as a debt, a disease, a prison, slavery, and a desert crossing.
>
> But when these five hindrances are given up in him, the bhikkhu regards this as freedom from debt, good health, release from prison, emancipation, and a place of safety at last.
>
> —MN 39

Being in debt doesn't mean creditors will harass you every single instant of your life. Even a prisoner doesn't have to face acute pain constantly; he might even experience less pain than some free people do at times. What all these five cases share in common is that even if everything is going relatively well, you can never be fully relaxed because the disturbance *could* return at any moment. The bulk of the misfortune is on the level of a never-ending *looming threat,* not just your observable, moment-to-moment situation.

Therefore, that there might be no sensual craving at specific times doesn't mean you're free from the hindrance. Even the wildest minds will experience occasional disinterest in sensuality, and that does not at all mean they are clear and pliable enough to see the Dhamma.

Incelibacy Automatically Implies Hindrances

The question that matters is: *can* sensual prospects move you? Do you sense the possibility that, if you are at the wrong place at the wrong time, the debt collectors will come for you?

If you presently plan to engage in sexual intercourse at any point in the future, even in a subsequent life, then you don't even need introspection to find the answer. It is already a sound "**Yes.**" By having such plans at the back of your mind, you are being moved ***now***, regardless of how far away in the future they are.

> … What are the five shackles of mind he has not severed?
>
> Firstly, a bhikkhu is not without passion, desire, fondness, thirst, burning, and craving for sensuality. This being so, his mind does not incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the first shackle of mind he has not severed. …
>
> He leads the celibate life for the sake of a certain heavenly existence, thinking: 'By this precept or observance or austerity or celibate life, may I become one of the gods!' This being so, his mind does not incline to diligence, dedication, persistence, and striving. This is the fifth shackle of mind, he has not cut off. These are the five shackles of mind, he has not cut off.
>
> When a bhikkhu has not abandoned these five obstinacies and cut off these five shackles of mind, it is not possible for him to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching-and-discipline. …
>
> —MN 16
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what then is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life?"

"Here, brahmin, some ascetic or brahmin, while declaring himself to lead the celibate life correctly, does not engage in sexual intercourse with women. Yet he accepts from women rubbing, massaging, bathing, or bodily anointing. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. This too, brahmin, is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life. This is called one who leads an impure celibate life. Bound by the bondage of sexuality, he is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

"Furthermore, brahmin, some ascetic or brahmin, while declaring himself to lead the celibate life correctly, does not engage in sexual intercourse with women, nor accepts rubbing or bathing from them; yet he jokes, plays, and amuses himself with them. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not joke, play, or amuse himself with women; yet he looks at them with an eye of longing, gazing intently at their eyes. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not gaze at women with an eye of longing; yet he listens to the sound of women—whether behind a wall or behind a fence—laughing, talking, singing, or crying. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not listen to the sound of women behind a wall or fence; yet he recalls the times when, in the past, he laughed, talked, and played with women. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not recall past times of laughter and play with women; yet he sees a householder or a householder's son enjoying himself provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure. He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. … etc."

"He does not look upon a householder or his son indulging in sensual pleasures; yet he leads the celibate life aspiring to a certain heavenly realm, thinking: 'By this virtue, this observance, this austerity, or this celibate life, may I become some kind of god or celestial being!' He enjoys that, he delights in that, and he finds satisfaction in it. This too, brahmin, is a breach, a hole, a blemish, a stain in the celibate life. This is called one who leads an impure celibate life. Bound by the bondage of sexuality, he is not freed from birth, aging, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. He is not freed from suffering, I say."

—AN 7.50

Notice that if the hindrances were to function the way commonly believed, the last person wouldn't have an issue as long as he wasn't *at the moment* fantasizing about future sensual rewards. In reality, holding those not-so-secret intentions for the future is an obstruction *in the present*. That person is mentally welcoming sensuality *presently* by having such intentions at the back of their mind, and they would *presently* experience pushback from their mind if they tried to give them up.

Mental Celibacy: The Decisive *and* Hardest Part

The complete absence of sensual inclinations that is required to understand the Dhamma is certainly harder to achieve for someone who has not been celibate in body for very long, but, as shown by cases of laypeople like Anāthapiṇḍika, it is not impossible.

… Then the Holy One taught the householder Upāli step by step, with a discourse on generosity, virtue, and heaven. ***He explained the peril, inferiority, and defilement of sensuality, and the benefit of renunciation. And, when he knew that Upāli's mind was ready, pliable, free from hindrances, elated, and confident,*** *he explained the special teaching of the Buddhas: suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path. Just as a clean cloth free from stains would properly absorb dye, so too, in that very seat, the stainless, immaculate eye of the Dhamma arose in Upāli: "Whatever has the nature of arising has the nature of ceasing." Then Upāli saw, attained, understood, and fathomed the Dhamma. He went beyond*

doubt, dispelled indecision, and became self-assured and independent of others regarding the Teacher's instructions. …

—MN 56

For your *citta* to be "like a clean cloth free from stains," what matters is not how recently you gave in to your desires, but that you are truly content and confident with celibacy and non-sensuality from now onwards—from the bottom of your *heart*, as it were, and not just as a means to an end. If your motivation for upholding celibacy and sense restraint is mere faith that they are necessary for Right View, and you would be secretly relieved if they were not required, then you still don't see the peril and inferiority of those things for yourself.

> … Then a second simile occurred to me. Suppose there was a green, sappy log, and it was lying on dry land far from the water. Then a man comes along with an upper fire stick, thinking to light a fire and produce heat. What do you think, Aggivessana? By drilling the stick against that green, sappy log on dry land far from water, could he light a fire and produce heat?"
>
> "No, Master Gotama. Why not? Because it is still a green, sappy log, despite lying on dry land far from water. That man will eventually become weary and frustrated."
>
> "In the same way, there are ascetics and brahmins who live withdrawn in body and mind from sensuality, but they have not internally given up and allayed desire, affection, infatuation, thirst, and burning for sensuality. Regardless of whether or not they feel violent, painful, sharp, severe, acute feelings, they are incapable of knowledge-and-vision, of supreme awakening. This was the second simile that occurred to me. …
>
> —MN 36

Now, this doesn't mean there is any sort of shortcut. It is precisely this celibacy of *intention*—which of course can only occur within actual physical celibacy—that people fear and are desperate to excuse themselves from.

It is not too rare to be able to spend long periods without sexual activity. It can be unpleasant, but for many it is tolerable if they can make up for it afterwards. But a single moment of a mental resolution to give up *all* sensual joys, with no end in sight, is unbearable for almost everyone.

Yet, for the mind to be prepared to see the Dhamma, it is that very resolution that needs to become a source of joy and confidence rather than fear. Why? Because if the mind is afraid to abandon sensuality completely, it is afraid of the Four Noble Truths. It is afraid of admitting what the true escape from suffering is, and that escape is what a *sotāpanna* has realized and understood how to develop even further.

All this being said, it is best not to rush it: the quicker you try to overcome the fear of renunciation and giving up, the more sharply you will have to confront it, and so the higher the chance that you will bite more than you can chew, get overwhelmed, and turn your back on the training. There is a reason we still remember the names of people like Anāthapiṇḍika and Visākhā: they were not representative of the average person even back then, let alone today.

So, by all means take it gradually if it's difficult, but don't start shifting the goalposts at any point.

Complete and Permanent Freedom Are Not the Same

Now, if all of this sounds like you need to become an *anāgāmi* to be free from hindrances, keep in mind that this is only because the idea of "suppressing" the hindrances—i.e., never actually freeing oneself from debt, illness, etc., but only having a break from their acute symptoms—is so taken for granted today that anything that challenges it sounds like an exaggeration.

Freedom from the hindrances *is* as profound and comprehensive as the Suttas portray it. But it does not automatically entail permanent freedom from that which produces unarisen hindrances. Namely, *ayoniso manasikāra*:

> And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sense desire, and for the increase and expansion of arisen sense desire? There is the sign of attractiveness. Attention not through

the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen sense desire, and for the increase and expansion of arisen sense desire.

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen aversion, and for the increase and expansion of arisen aversion? There is the sign of opposition. Attention not through the origin with regard to that it is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen aversion, and for the increase and expansion of arisen aversion.

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, and for the increase and expansion of arisen indolence-and-lethargy? There is discontent, sloth, yawning, drowsiness after a meal, and sluggishness of mind. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen indolence-and-lethargy, and for the increase and expansion of arisen indolence-and-lethargy.

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness-and-anxiety, and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness-and-anxiety? There is disquietude of mind. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness-and-anxiety, and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness-and-anxiety.

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen doubt, and for the increase and expansion of arisen doubt? There are things that are grounds for doubt. Attention not through the origin with regard to that is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen doubt, and for the increase and expansion of arisen doubt. …

—SN 46.51

Only noble understanding sets a limit on how far *ayoniso manasikāra* can still occur—until, for the Arahant, there is no room for it at all, and the mind stands completely beyond the hindrances (SN 54.12).

For the *puthujjana* at the other extreme, there is no limit whatsoever. This is why it is said that beings who develop their minds sufficiently to be reborn as Brahmā gods, completely transcending sensuality yet not understanding the Dhamma, eventually fall back down as low as the hells many eons later.

"… Baka the Brahmā saw me coming off in the distance and said, 'Come, good sir! Welcome, good sir! It has been a long time since you took the opportunity to come here. For this is permanent, this is everlasting, this is eternal, this is complete, this is imperishable. For this is where there is no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or reappearing. And there is no other escape beyond this.'

When he had spoken, I said to him, 'Alas, Baka the Brahmā is lost in ignorance! Alas, Baka the Brahmā is lost in ignorance! Because what is actually impermanent, not lasting, transient, incomplete, and perishable, he says is permanent, everlasting, eternal, complete, and imperishable. And where there is being born, growing old, dying, passing away, and reappearing, he says that there is no being born, growing old, dying, passing away, or reappearing. And although there is another escape beyond this, he says that there is no other escape beyond this. …'

—MN 49

The same principle operates within this life. Though the mind can here and now become *completely withdrawn* from sensual desire—not merely suppressing it—as long as the Dhamma has not been fully understood, that desire can still return. Not immediately, for otherwise it was never truly absent, but after a sufficient period of negligence.

Friend, there is the case where a certain individual abides having entered upon the first jhāna. Thinking, "I am one who obtains the first jhāna," he dwells entangled with bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen, laywomen, the king, the king's ministers, members of other sects and their disciples.

Living entangled, bold, uninhibited, and devoted to chatter, passion invades his mind. With a mind invaded by passion, he returns to the inferior life having given up the training.

> Friend, suppose that heavy rain made the dust on a crossroads disappear and mud appear. Would one who says, "Now dust will never again appear in that crossroads?" be speaking rightly?
>
> 'No, friend. For people or cattle might walk on that crossroads, or wind and heat might exhaust the moisture. Then the dust would appear once more.'
>
> "In just this way, friend, there is the case where an individual abides having entered upon the first jhāna … Thinking, 'I am one who obtains the first jhāna,' he dwells entangled with bhikkhus … he returns to the inferior life having given up the training.
>
> —AN 6.60

For lay followers like Anāthapiṇḍika who attained *sotāpatti* after their first conversation with the Buddha, their Right View set a permanent limit on *ayoniso manasikāra*, but only enough to uproot personality-view, doubt, and the holding on to any sense of moral duty. As they lived engaged in worldly affairs, the freedom that allowed them to see the Dhamma faded, and celibacy ceased to be the natural inclination of their minds: unarisen hindrances arose once more.

Because they were satisfied with their attainment and thus complacent, they ceased to be celibate. Until that changed, they were no longer going "against the stream" and progressing further towards Arahantship.

> "Bhikkhus, there are these four kinds of individuals found in the world. What four?
>
> 1. One who goes with the stream,
> 2. one who goes against the stream,
> 3. one who stands firm,
> 4. and one who has crossed over and reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground.
>
> And what is the individual who goes with the stream?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual enjoys sensual pleasures and does bad deeds. This is called the individual who goes with the stream.
>
> And what is the individual who goes against the stream?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual does not enjoy sensual pleasures and does not do bad deeds. Even though he suffers, even though he is sorrowful, even with tearful face and weeping, he lives the complete and pure celibate life. This is called the individual who goes against the stream.
>
> And what is the individual who stands firm?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual, with the ending of the five lower fetters, is one who reappears spontaneously and becomes extinguished there, not liable to return from that world. This is called the individual who stands firm.
>
> And what is the individual who has crossed over and reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground?
> Here, bhikkhus, an individual, with the destruction of the influxes, abides having entered upon the liberation by mind and liberation by understanding that is devoid of influxes, having for himself comprehended and realized it right in the present experience. This is called the individual who has crossed over, reached the far shore—a brahmin standing on dry ground.
>
> These, bhikkhus, are the four kinds of individuals found in the world."
>
> Those who are unrestrained regarding sensual pleasures,
> who are not free from lust, who live indulging in sensual enjoyments—
> they go again and again to birth and aging,
> overcome by craving, going with the stream.
>
> Therefore the wise one, mindful here,
> not pursuing sensual pleasures or evil deeds—

even in pain, he should give up sensual pleasures;
such an individual is called one who goes against the stream.

Whoever has abandoned the five defilements,
is a complete trainee, not subject to decline,
master of his mind, with faculties composed—
that man is called one who stands firm.

For him who, having comprehended the higher and lower states,
they are are dispelled, destroyed, and are no more—
that sage, who has lived the holy life,
gone to the world's end, is called one who has gone beyond.

—AN 4.5

The Peril of Sensuality

by Bhikkhu Anīgha

What The Buddha Actually Thought About Sensuality Contrary to ideas often promoted in modern teachings, to say that the Buddha spoke disapprovingly of sensuality is an understatement:

> "… And how has a bhikkhu seen sensuality in such a way that no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensuality underlies him?
>
> Suppose there was a charcoal pit deeper than a man's height, filled with glowing coals that neither flamed nor smoked. Then a man would come along who wants to live and does not want to die, who desires happiness and is averse to suffering. Two strong men would grab him by the arms and drag him towards the charcoal pit. He would writhe and struggle to and fro. Why is that? For that man knows, 'If I fall in that charcoal pit, that will lead to my death or deadly pain.'
>
> In the same way, when a bhikkhu has seen sensuality as a charcoal pit, no underlying tendency for desire, affection, infatuation, and passion for sensuality underlies him. …"
>
> —SN 35.244
>
> "… Is it true, Ariṭṭha, that you have such a pernicious view: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them'?"
>
> "Indeed, venerable sir. As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them."
>
> **"Inept man, who on earth have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma like that?** Inept man, have I not said in many ways that obstructive things are obstructive, and that they truly obstruct one who engages in them? I have said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. With the similes of a skeleton … a scrap of meat … a grass torch … a pit of glowing coals … a dream … borrowed goods … fruit on a tree … a butcher's knife and chopping block … a staking sword … a snake's head, I have said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. Even so, inept man, you misrepresent us with your misunderstanding, harm yourself, and create much demerit. This will be for your lasting harm and suffering."
>
> Then the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus: "What do you think, bhikkhus? Is this bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, the former vulture catcher, warmed up at all in this teaching and discipline?"
>
> "How could that be, venerable sir? Of course not, venerable sir."

When this was said, the bhikkhu Ariṭṭha, the former vulture catcher, sat silent, humiliated, with his trunk drooping, facing downwards, brooding and speechless.

Knowing this, the Buddha said, "Inept man, you will be known by your own pernicious view. I shall question the bhikkhus about this."

Then the Buddha said to the bhikkhus, "Bhikkhus, do you understand my teaching as this Ariṭṭha does, when he misrepresents us with his misunderstanding, harms himself, and creates much demerit?"

"No, venerable sir. For in many ways the Buddha has told us that obstructive things are obstructive, and that they truly obstruct one who engages in them. The Buddha has said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. With the similes of a skeleton … a snake's head, the Buddha has said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater."

"Very good, bhikkhus! It is good that you understand my teaching like this. For in many ways I have said that obstructive things are obstructive …

I've said that sensuality provides little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater. But still this Ariṭṭha misrepresents us with his misunderstanding, harms himself, and creates much demerit. This will be for his lasting harm and suffering. Truly, bhikkhus, it is impossible to partake in sensuality without sensual desires, sensual perceptions, and sensual thoughts.

—MN 22

"If a novice should say this: 'As I understand the Buddha's teaching, the things he calls obstructions are not true obstructions for one who engages in them.'

That novice should be spoken to by the bhikkhus thus: 'Friend novice, do not say this. Do not misrepresent the Buddha. It is not good to misrepresent the Buddha. The Buddha would not speak thus. In many ways, friend novice, have obstructive things been called obstructive by the Buddha. They truly obstruct one who engages in them.'

And if that novice, being spoken to thus by the bhikkhus, should hold to that same view, that novice should be spoken to by the bhikkhus thus: 'From this day forth, friend novice, **you are not to refer to the Buddha as your Teacher.** And that which other novices receive—lodging for two or three nights with the bhikkhus—that is not for you. Away with you! Be gone!'

Whatever bhikkhu, knowing such a banished novice, should associate with him, or support him, or eat with him, or lie down together with him, it is an offense entailing confession."

—Bhikkhu Pācittiya 70[163]

"Is This Sensuality?"

Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.

The pretty things in the world aren't sensuality.

Passionate intention is a man's sensuality.

The pretty things in the world stay just as they are,

But the wise dispel desire there.

—AN 6.63

[163]See also Sudinna's story at Pārājika 1.

Sensuality isn't everything agreeable to your senses. There will be enjoyable things, even fully mundane ones, that are not sensuality. Conversely, there are things you might not at first glance associate with sensuality, yet they are because of your relationship with them.

Whether something is sensuality is determined by one question: how would you feel if you lost that thing, *forever*? If the mere thought fills you with dread, that thing is sensuality for you.

Seeing the peril in sensuality means seeing the peril in developing such passionate relationships with anything at all, animate or inanimate. Your passion is the problem, not the things themselves.

However, there is one thing where sensuality cannot be absent, which is why an Arahant is incapable of partaking in it. Namely, sexual intercourse:

> A bhikkhu who has destroyed the taints cannot engage in sexual intercourse.
>
> —AN 9.7

The Danger Someone who enjoys playing with venomous snakes doesn't need to reason out some novel, elaborate idea to recognize the danger; they just need to stop habitually looking past the acute danger to their own life that is *already there*. If they saw that clearly, any joy that activity could have offered would become utterly incapable of justifying engagement in it.

> A man attracted to sensual pleasures,
> When in that he finds success,
> Surely becomes joyful
> In gaining what he wished.
>
> **But when for one so attracted—**
> **One whose desire is aroused—**
> **Those pleasures abandon him**
> **It strikes him like a piercing dart.**
>
> Whoever keeps clear of attractions
> As his foot from a snake's head,
> The entanglement in the world
> he mindfully surmounts.
>
> Whether fields, land, gold or cattle,
> Horses, slaves, servants, women or family —
> All varieties of attractions —
> A man who covets these things,
>
> Is overpowered by the powerless,
> And crushed by difficulties;
> Suffering goes along with him,
> Like water in a cracked boat.
>
> Therefore a person, always mindful,
> should keep clear of attractions.
> With these abandoned, they would cross the flood,
> As one who reaches the far shore, having bailed out the boat.
>
> —Sutta Nipāta 4.1

Imagine someone offers you that which you desire most, flawless in all respects. But they warn you: from the moment you accept it, it could be callously ripped away without warning; no amount of safety mechanisms you successfully create around the precious thing can fully remove that possibility.

This is precisely the threat that underlies every pleasure within the domain of the senses.

Ignorance Is "Bliss"

> "Bhikkhus, there are these five themes that should often be reflected upon by a woman or a man, by a householder or one gone forth. What five? (1) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to old age; I am not exempt from old age.' (2) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to illness; I am not exempt from illness.' (3) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am subject to death; I am not exempt from death.' (4) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: **'I shall be parted and separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.'** (5) A woman or a man, a householder or one gone forth, should often reflect thus: 'I am the owner of my actions, the heir of my actions; I have actions as my origin, actions as my relative, actions as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever actions, good or bad, that I do.'
> —AN 5.57

The Buddha explicitly prescribed regular reflection on the impending separation from everything dear to you. But since people's "Buddhist practice" often revolves around anything but such reflections, they continue to ignore how they live under constant risk for the sake of transient joys.

> "… Suppose there was a dense forest grove not far from a town or village. And there was a tree laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit had fallen to the ground. And along came a man in need of fruit, wandering in search of fruit. Having plunged deep into that forest grove, he would see that tree laden with fruit. He would think: 'That tree is laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit has fallen to the ground. But I know how to climb a tree. Why don't I climb the tree, eat as much as I like, then fill my pouch?' And that is what he would do. And along would come a second man in need of fruit, wandering in search of fruit, carrying a sharp axe. Having plunged deep into that forest grove, he would see that tree laden with fruit. He would think: 'That tree is laden with fruit, yet none of the fruit has fallen to the ground. But I do not know how to climb a tree. Why don't I fell this tree at the root, eat as much as I like, then fill my pouch?' And so, he would fell the tree at the root. What do you think, householder? If the first man who climbed the tree does not quickly come down, when that tree fell, would he not break his hand, arm, or other limb, resulting in death or deadly suffering for him?"
>
> "Yes, venerable sir."
>
> "In the same way, a noble disciple reflects: 'With the simile of the fruit tree, the Buddha has said that sensuality gives little gratification and much suffering and distress, and the peril there is what is greater.' …"
>
> —MN 54

The disorienting array of options for replacing desirable things you lost, and for creating a false sense of safety around available ones, might seem like it mostly keeps the suffering and distress at bay. You can easily spend your entire life redirecting your passion from one thing to the next, with zero forced downtime prompting you to recognize the futility of the whole pattern.

But the danger in sensuality cannot be kept at bay by any amount of protections or replacements. It doesn't first come into being when something is lost; it exists *presently*, as the inseparable counterpart of passion.

*Even during the most joyful times, you **know** that the tree could fall.*

Even if you make no deliberate effort to reflect on it, you still *know* that losing things you love, or not getting them to begin with, is never fully off the table. Otherwise you wouldn't have that visceral instinct to protect them.

The inescapable uncertainty of things coupled with your passion for them means a constant undertone of anxiety. But since enjoying the fruits at the top while the tree hasn't fallen yet is the only happiness you know, the very straightforward escape from the threat seems so unpalatable that you might even refuse to consider it:

> Udāyi, there are these five avenues of sensuality. What five? Sights cognizable by the eye that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. Sounds cognizable by the ear … Smells cognizable by the nose … Tastes cognizable by the tongue … Touches cognizable by the body that are likable, desirable, agreeable, pleasing, connected with sensuality, and enticing. These are the five avenues of sensuality.
>
> Udāyi, the pleasure and joy that arise based on these five avenues of sensuality is called sensual pleasure—the pleasure of excrement, the pleasure of ordinary people, the ignoble pleasure. **It is not to be partaken in, cultivated, or made much of.**
>
> ***I say that this pleasure ought to be feared.***
>
> —MN 66

The Danger Must Become Apparent It's not enough to give up sensuality as a calculated trade-off for the positive benefits of the practice, which leaves open the possibility to have both if only you could. Even if you've given it up outwardly, unless the connection between sensuality and acute peril is crystal-clear, a thread of passion towards it automatically remains. Strengthening your discernment of that connection is the one and only path to peace; any peace while that passion remains would feel like peace only to a leper who takes his condition entirely for granted.

> "Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives, brought a physician to treat him. The physician would make medicine for him, and by means of that medicine the man would be cured of his leprosy and would become well and happy, independent, master of himself, able to go where he likes. Then two strong men would seize him by both arms and drag him towards a burning charcoal pit. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that man twist his body this way and that?"
>
> "Yes, Master Gotama. Why is that? Because that fire is indeed painful to touch, hot, and scorching."
>
> "What do you think, Māgandiya? Is it only now that the fire is painful to touch, hot, and scorching, or previously too was that fire painful to touch, hot, and scorching?"
>
> "Master Gotama, that fire is now painful to touch, hot, and scorching, and previously too that fire was painful to touch, hot, and scorching. For when that man was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, his faculties were impaired; thus, though the fire was actually painful to touch, he gained a mistaken perception of it as pleasant."
>
> "So too, Māgandiya, in the past sensuality was painful to touch, hot, and scorching; in the future sensuality will be painful to touch, hot, and scorching; and now at present sensuality is painful to touch, hot, and scorching. **But these beings who are not free from lust for sensuality, who are devoured by craving for sensuality, who burn with fever for sensuality, have broken faculties; thus, though sensuality is actually painful to touch, they gained a distorted perception of it as pleasant.**
>
> "Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit; the more he scratches the scabs and cauterises his body, the fouler, more evil-smelling and more infected the openings of his wounds would become, yet he would find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in scratching the openings of his wounds. So too, Māgandiya, beings who are not free from lust for sensuality, who are devoured by craving for sensuality, who burn with fever for sensuality, still indulge in sensuality; the more such beings indulge in sensuality, the more their craving for sensuality increases and the more

they are burned by their fever for sensuality, yet they find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in dependence on the five avenues of sensuality.

"What do you think, Māgandiya? Have you ever seen or heard of a king or a king's minister enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five avenues of sensuality, not having abandoned craving for sensuality, not having removed fever for sensuality, who could abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, or who is able or who will be able to so abide?"—"No, Master Gotama."

"Good, Māgandiya. I too have never seen or heard of a king or a king's minister enjoying himself, provided and endowed with the five avenues of sensuality, not having abandoned craving for sensuality, not having removed fever for sensuality, who could abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, or who is able or who will be able to so abide. **On the contrary, Māgandiya, those recluses or brahmins who abided or abide or will abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace, all do so after having understood as they actually are the origin, the disappearance, the gratification, the danger, and the escape regarding sensuality, and it is after abandoning craving for sensuality and removing fever for sensuality that they abided or abide or will abide free from thirst, with a mind inwardly at peace."**

—MN 75

There simply *could not be* an effective path to freedom from *dukkha*, regardless of time or culture, wherein the need to give up sensuality was anything less than absolute. Delight in sensuality requires an attitude of denial regarding the essence of the Dhamma: *liability to cessation that makes no exceptions*. Hence, without abandoning that delight, there is no room for the Right View.

The Myth of Meditation Techniques

By Bhikkhu Anīgha

Modern Buddhist practice revolves around attentional exercises like staying with the breath, scanning bodily sensations, visualization, noting mental events. Even when these approaches are given a narrative that sounds faithful to early Buddhist ideals—as "means to restrain the mind and purify it from defilements"—closer scrutiny than they usually receive shows that they cannot achieve those aims.

The common thread behind these exercises is revealed by what happens when you stop them: the attitude that disturbance requires action, which is what craving is, remains intact. When sooner or later an issue arises and you cannot rely on a technique, you will feel the pull to act—whether by indulging defilements or reaching for relief through distraction. Meditation techniques are one more response, just an arbitrarily permissible one, within the same pattern that makes indulgence necessary to abandon: circumventing immediate suffering while guaranteeing its eventual return.

Why Techniques Cannot Address Craving

These widespread attentional drills eliminate the only context in which craving can be exposed and undermined at its root: the friction that arises when an impulse presses for relief and no escape—neither in indulgence nor denial—is sought. Withstanding this unrelieved tension is what trains the mind to lose its compulsions altogether. Techniques get in the way of this training by shifting the effort from intentional, reflective restraint to the performance of a separate activity, making non-compliance with lust and aversion a side effect rather than a conscious, unmediated effort. Like handing a spoiled child toys to quiet its tantrums instead of letting the spoiled habits themselves fade.

When techniques lead to behavioral change, they do so by shifting dependence from an outside engagement to an internal one. The core problem the Dhamma is meant to resolve, of needing to act in order to escape discomfort, has not changed. This very narrow escape route is shut when circumstances obstruct management rituals: illness, chaos, sudden triggers. Even if improved conduct is maintained lifelong, the dependence on diversion to deal with displeasure will have to manifest in behaviors besides spiritual management alone.

Moreover, the factual relief from *symptoms* makes devout practitioners of techniques unlikely to recognize and critically examine the pattern of lingering illness. If suffering resurfaces, they will attribute it to insufficient diligence or a need for minor adjustments in approach—not to the fundamental misdirection of their efforts. The problem is not that a palliative will always remain a palliative, but that it hasn't been applied well or long enough.

"It's About the Insights"

Practitioners of meditation techniques report realizations that feel transformative, often equating them with the attainments found in the Suttas. Yet these realizations share the same flaw as the practices that generate them: they are management tactics. They serve as sophisticated rationalizations, requiring recall and the aid of novelty during moments of turmoil to have an effect. By contrast, noble understanding does not need to be recalled or "applied." The inability for suffering to return in the first place is absolute and independent of a choice to maintain perspective:

> Thus have I heard:
>
> At one time, the Buddha was staying at Sāvatthi, in the Jeta Grove, in Anāthapiṇḍika's park.
>
> At that time, the Tathāgata said to the monks:
>
> "Suppose there is a lake, vast and long, fifty leagues wide and equally deep. If a man were to dip the tip of a single hair into that lake water, what do you think, monks? Which is greater, the water in the lake, or the single drop lifted by the man on the tip of a hair?"
>
> The monks said to the Buddha:
>
> "Tathāgata, the single drop lifted by the man on the tip of a hair is exceedingly small, while the lake water is immeasurably greater—a thousand, ten-thousand, a hundred-million times greater. There is no comparison."
>
> The Buddha said to the monks:
>
> "So it is for the disciple of the World-Honored One who possesses the vision of truth and is endowed with Right View. When a disciple realizes the fruit of truth with immediate and perfect understanding, they have without delay cut off and comprehended suffering. They have severed the root, just as a Tāla tree whose top has been cut **can never grow again.**
>
> The various sufferings they have severed are vast and immeasurable, like the water of that great lake, while the suffering that remains is like the drop of water on the tip of a hair."
>
> Having spoken this discourse, the monks, hearing what the Buddha taught, rejoiced and put it into practice.
>
> —Saṃyukta Āgama 891 (parallel to SN 13.1)

Noble attainments are not a novel way of relating to or dealing with suffering when it arises. When unmediated restraint has worn away craving itself and revealed its futile nature, the very same experiences that used to constitute suffering cease to be suffering at all. It's not that sense experience has been modified by some "perceptual shift," but that the *internal susceptibility* to forceful sense experiences, the ignorant call to action that made them emotionally compelling, is gone:

> Venerable sir, for a monk whose mind is thus rightly liberated, even if forceful sights cognizable by the eye … sounds cognizable by the ear … smells cognizable by the nose … tastes cognizable by the tongue … touches cognizable by the body … phenomena cognizable by the mental faculty come into the range of the eye … mental faculty, they do not overpower his mind (*citta*). His mind remains equally unmixed, steady, attained to imperturbability, and he is attuned to the impermanence of [that very mind].
>
> Venerable sir, it is as if there were a rocky mountain, without holes, without hollows, a single solid mass. Even if a heavy wind and rain should come from the east, west, north, or south, it

would not shake it, would not rock it, would not make it tremble.
—AN 6.55

Here, monks, a monk is an Arahant, one with taints destroyed, who has completed the life of non-sensuality, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, with the fetters of being utterly destroyed, rightly liberated by understanding.

His five faculties still stand; owing to their non-destruction, he undergoes the agreeable and the disagreeable, he experiences pleasure and pain. The destruction of passion, the destruction of aversion, the destruction of muddledness in him—this is called, monks, the Nibbāna-element with residue.
—Itivuttaka 44

Meditation methods cannot produce this unconditional freedom because they work by managing sense experience itself—creating buffers, redirections, modifications to what is experienced. They shelter you from wind and rain rather than turning your mind into solid rock. Techniques, by their very mechanism, ensure that whatever relief comes will perish without constant maintenance:

Monks, endowed with five qualities, a monk cannot attain right composure (*sammā-samādhi*) and abide in it. What five? It is when **a monk cannot endure sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches.** Endowed with these five qualities, a monk cannot abide having entered upon right composure.

Endowed with five qualities, a monk can attain right composure and abide in it. What five? It is when a monk can endure sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches. Endowed with these five qualities, a monk can abide having entered upon right composure.
—AN 5.113

Monks, an unlearned ordinary person speaks of the ocean. But that is not the ocean in the training of the Noble One. That is just a large body of water, a large sea of water. The eye [the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the mental faculty], monks, is the ocean for a man, and its tide is made of sights [sounds, smells, tastes, touches, phenomena].

One who **withstands** that tide is said to have crossed over the ocean of the eye, with its waves and whirlpools, its saltwater crocodiles and monsters. Crossed over, that true brahmin stands on dry land.
—SN 35.228

The fact that they work by managing the appearance of suffering means that noble attainments cannot emerge from meditation techniques. The borrowing of phrases like "stream-entry" does not make those realizations match what was originally meant with those terms.

The Gradual Training as the Actual "Method"

The widespread adoption of these palliative exercises is not incidental. It is the result of treating practices the Buddha taught only to renunciates as viable for everyone, and of granting leeway in behavioral purification when there ought to be none:

"Is it possible, Master Gotama, to describe a sequential training, sequential progress, and sequential practice in this teaching-and-discipline?"

"It is possible, brahmin. Suppose a deft horse trainer were to obtain a fine thoroughbred. First of all, he would accustom it to wearing the bit. In the same way, when the Tathāgata obtains a man for training, he first guides him like this:

'Come, bhikkhu, be virtuous. Live restrained by the code of conduct, endowed with proper behavior and a suitable environment. **Seeing danger in the slightest fault,** train yourself in the training rules.'

> When the monk is virtuous, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, guard your sense doors… do not grasp at signs and features [of signs, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, phenomena] … bring about the restraint of the mental faculty.'
>
> When the monk has his sense doors guarded, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be moderate in eating … eat only to sustain this body, to avoid harm, and to support the life of non-sensuality (*brahmacariya*).'
>
> When the monk eats in moderation, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be committed to vigilance. During the day and night, cleanse your mind of obstructive states while walking or sitting …'
>
> When the monk is committed to vigilance, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, be possessed of recollectedness-and-awareness [in all postures and activities] …'
>
> When the monk is possessed of recollectedness-and-awareness, the Tathāgata guides him further: 'Come, monk, frequent a secluded lodging …'
>
> There, he sits down cross-legged and establishes recollectedness at the fore. He gives up these five hindrances, defilements of the mind that weaken understanding. Then, having thoroughly withdrawn from sensuality, having withdrawn from unbeneficial phenomena… he abides having entered upon the first jhāna… [and so on up to the fourth jhāna]."
> —MN 107

The sequence is clear: what modern meditation methods aim to achieve—yet do not—comes after a multitude of prior steps that are hardly ever fulfilled. Crucially, no "technique" for cleansing the mind of hindrances is ever mentioned in the Suttas. Not having fulfilled the prior steps in itself implies you cannot abandon the hindrances even if you try; having fulfilled them means you know the way to overcome them and already weakened them greatly.

It is *because* of being deeply submerged in the hindrances and not knowing their escape that you would have flaws in your virtue, fail to restrain your sense faculties, etc. Conversely, there is no way to be accomplished in virtue, sense restraint, etc., without dealing with the hindrances internally: compliance with rules driven by external motives (such as enforced communal standards) does not train your virtue, much less the further stages.

What precedes *jhāna* is the removal of a minor degree of hindrances that remains for someone who not only emulated but *internalized* the prerequisites fully. This is why the sequence remains non-negotiable even when abandoning techniques entirely:

> "'Now, between Sāvatthī and Sāketa seven chariots were stationed at the ready for me. Then, having departed Sāvatthī, I mounted the first chariot at the ready by the gate of the royal compound. The first chariot at the ready brought me to the second, where I dismounted and mounted the second chariot. … The second chariot brought me to the third … the fourth … the fifth … the sixth … The sixth chariot at the ready brought me to the seventh, where I dismounted and mounted the seventh chariot. The seventh chariot at the ready brought me to the gate of the royal compound of Sāketa.' That is how King Pasenadi should rightly reply."
>
> "In the same way, venerable, **purification of virtue is only for the sake of purification of mind.** Purification of mind is only for the sake of purification of view."
> —MN 24
>
> Venerables, if there be a monk who violates the precepts, breaks the precepts, breaches the precepts, punctures the precepts, defiles the precepts, or blackens the precepts, yet desires to rely on the precepts to establish virtue—using virtue as a ladder to ascend to the Hall of Unsurpassed Wisdom and the Pavilion of the True Dhamma—ultimately, this is impossible.
>
> Venerables, it is like a multi-storied lookout or terraced pavilion situated not far from a village, wherein a ladder is placed, or ten steps or twelve steps are set. If a person comes, seeking and wishing to ascend that hall or pavilion, yet without treading upon the first step of this ladder,

wishes to tread upon the second step—ultimately, this is impossible. If they do not tread upon the second step, yet wish to ascend the third or fourth, up to ascending the hall or pavilion—ultimately, this is impossible …
—Madhyama Āgama 80

"But the Buddha Taught *Ānāpānasati, Satipaṭṭhāna …*" The methods contemporarily branded as *ānāpānasati*, *satipaṭṭhāna*, *brahmavihāra*, etc., are not what the teachings in the Suttas refer to. Those instructions presuppose being already free from the need that their modern replicas address—the impulse to respond to the unwholesome with distraction:

> Monk, **when your mind is internally steady, well settled, and arisen unbeneficial phenomena are not able to obsess it**, then, monk, you should train thus: "I shall cultivate the liberation of mind through friendliness (*mettā*). I shall make much of it, make it a vehicle, make it a basis, practice it, grow it, and properly undertake it." This, monk, is how you should train …
>
> You should train thus: "I shall abide with perspective of the body within the body [feelings within feelings, mind within mind, phenomena within phenomena], ardent, aware, and recollected, having dispelled longing and distress in regard to the world." This, monk, is how you should train …
>
> —AN 8.63

As passages like the following show, the foundation—"your mind is internally steady, well settled, and arisen unbeneficial phenomena are not able to obsess it"—is established not by any contemplative practice, but by prior training in correct restraint, which in itself steadies the mind:

> "Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill knowledge and release?"
>
> "The seven factors of awakening, Kuṇḍaliya, when developed and cultivated, fulfill knowledge and release."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven factors of awakening?"
>
> "The four establishments of recollectedness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven factors of awakening."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness?"
>
> "The three kinds of proper conduct, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness."
>
> "But, Master Gotama, what things, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the three kinds of proper conduct?"
>
> "Restraint of the sense faculties, when developed and cultivated, fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct.
>
> And how, Kuṇḍaliya, is restraint of the sense faculties developed and cultivated so that it fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct? Here, **having seen a pleasing sight with the eye, a monk does not long for it, or become excited, or generate passion. His body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released. Having seen a displeasing sight with the eye, he is not dismayed, not daunted, not dejected, without a mind of ill will. His body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released.** *[and so on for the remaining five senses]*.
>
> When having seen a sight with the eye, a monk's body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released in regard to both pleasing and displeasing sights; when, having heard a sound with the ear … smelled an odor with the nose … tasted a taste with the tongue … experienced a touch with the body … cognized a phenomenon with the mental faculty, a monk's

> body is steady and his mind is steady, internally well settled and well released in regard to both pleasing and displeasing phenomena, then his restraint of the sense faculties has been developed and cultivated in such a way that it fulfills the three kinds of proper conduct.
>
> And how, Kuṇḍaliya, are the three kinds of proper conduct developed and cultivated so that they fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness? Here, Kuṇḍaliya, having abandoned bodily misconduct, a monk develops proper bodily conduct; having abandoned verbal misconduct, he develops proper verbal conduct; having abandoned mental misconduct, he develops proper mental conduct. It is in this way that the three kinds of proper conduct are developed and cultivated so that they **fulfill the four establishments of recollectedness.**"
>
> —SN 46.6

> Monks, without abandoning six things, one is incapable of abiding with perspective of the body within the body internally … the body externally … the body internally and externally … feelings internally … feelings externally … feelings internally and externally … the mind internally … the mind externally … the mind internally and externally … phenomena internally … phenomena externally … phenomena internally and externally.
>
> What are the six? Delight in work, delight in talk, delight in sleep, delight in company, not guarding the sense faculties, and lack of moderation in eating.
> —AN 6.118

The Training That Uproots The unresolved friction of not following unwholesome pulls is what trains the mind to be "internally well settled." Any practice whose goal is to remove this friction can only *prevent* the development of virtue, turning what would by itself have led to significant internal transformation into mere rule-keeping that eventually collapses when artificial buffers are taken away.

When you refuse both indulgence and distraction from defilements, you will be faced with the pain of unrelieved craving. And that's the point: that craving is there now because whenever you were in the same situation in the past, you unthinkingly made the wrong choice. By indulging or distracting yourself, you gave in to craving against the pain of craving, thereby adding fuel to the very same fire.

Each time craving arises and you neither follow it nor seek means to appease it, the expectation that this craving must be answered weakens. The craving comes, presses with its characteristic urgency, and… nothing happens. It eventually subsides on its own, having been unable to bait you. As you train in this whenever you're pressured by something unwholesome, the association between craving and necessity to act breaks down. When the association has worn away entirely, craving itself has no space to exist, and that's the only safe form of relief. As much as techniques suppress specific instances of misconduct, by taking this root association as a given, they maintain the propensity for sensual and hateful acts.

The Gradual Training eliminates the appeal of both indulgence and meditation techniques. It trains the mind to withstand the pull toward the unwholesome without consolations, until craving itself subsides. The mind that has tasted the removal of craving rather than its management will only feel encumbered by diversionary measures to tackle whatever impurities remain.